

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: R. Burl Yarberry

"I think if I drew a bill of particulars about an ideal [state] superintendent [of schools], it would be that he or she would be an intellectual, and a visionary. And we fill in with that. Those are the things that are hard to come by, and they don't come down the road very often. People are too cramped and warped by that time to have the courage and the vision to play with ideas and to have the ability to sell those ideas and to put them into reality. I recognize a lot of the dynamics of the thing, and obviously I've thought a lot about it. But I still think that something like that is what the system needed and needs."

Rodney Burl Yarberry was born November 11, 1920 in Pueblo, Colorado. He attended public schools in Pueblo and graduated from high school in 1938. After spending a year studying to be an engineer at the Colorado School of Mines, he enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps and served in the Pacific during World War II. Following his discharge, he first enrolled at Western State College of Colorado and received his B.A. in English, then the University of Arizona for his M.A. Between 1950 and 1954, Yarberry taught a variety of subjects at Ouray High School in Colorado.

In 1956, Yarberry received a Ph.D. in English from the University of New Mexico. Shortly thereafter, he arrived in Hawai'i as an English instructor at the University of Hawai'i-Hilo. He soon became the college's director, a position equivalent to chancellor today.

In 1962, at the age of 41, Yarberry was selected to be state superintendent of schools, succeeding Walton M. Gordon.

After a four-year tenure as superintendent, Yarberry resigned and became coordinator of secondary education and boys' school principal at the Kamehameha Schools. Two years later, he was named commissioner of education for the U.S. Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. Beginning in 1972, Yarberry has been involved in various federal and private projects focusing on educational reform in Indonesia and elsewhere.

Now retired, Yarberry lives in Hilo with his wife, Bethel Faye Yarberry.

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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

R. Burl Yarberry (BY)

September 12, 1991

Hilo, Hawai'i

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: This is an interview with Dr. Burl Yarberry, on September 12, 1991, at his home in Hilo, Hawai'i. The interviewer is Warren Nishimoto.

Okay, Dr. Yarberry, why don't we begin. First of all, can you tell me when you were born and where you were born?

BY: I was born on Armistice Day [November 11], 1920 in Pueblo, Colorado.

WN: Can you tell me something about your parents?

BY: My parents were, (to me), very interesting people. My father was from an (early) ranching family in southern Colorado, a very large family. My mother came from another large family in southeastern Missouri. My father was a rancher and farmer (early on), and then a steel worker during the [Great] Depression, then he worked for the city highway department until he retired years later. That's very roughly his span (of occupation). He had an eighth-grade education. My brothers and I look upon him as having been very intelligent but unschooled. We all (initially) took engineering, my brothers and I (at Colorado School of Mines). And we have admitted from time to time (to each other) that he would have made a much better engineer than any of us. But he simply had no orientation or opportunity to go beyond the eighth grade. And incidentally, he thought (that) that was enough [education] for (us as well).

My mother probably went through the sixth grade, (I'm not sure). But she, in her own right, was (quite) intelligent. When she was maybe seventeen, she had saved her money and went down to the little railroad station near Greenville, Missouri. She put the money on the counter—and she kept back oh, two or three dollars—and (then) she said she wanted to go as far west as she could. At that time, she had an older sister in La Junta, Colorado. But (my mother's) money (finally) took her to Pueblo, Colorado. She had a very difficult time (early on), but eventually she became friends with the nuns of a Catholic hospital there. She worked hard for them as a charwoman and so forth, and they eventually worked her into nurse's training and she (eventually) became a graduate registered nurse. That was her profession all her life. She was a remarkable nurse. She had such patients as Mamie Eisenhower and Mamie's parents, (the Dowds), in Denver, Colorado. She was simply a very sought-after surgical nurse. And she (continued) working almost until the time she died of cancer. (She

was an especially strong influence in my life.)

She had the dream of (having) my brothers and me to go on to school. I was the first one who actually enrolled and went beyond high school. We (had) had a (solid) school system in Pueblo. A good elementary system. The teachers were memorable and incredibly dedicated. The high school, (Central High School), was, (in retrospect), a (fine) one. Somewhere along that line I caught the excitement of intellectual pursuits, (of learning). And so, much of my career has been pursuing (knowledge. My range of pursuit has been from a wonderfully intercultural kindergarten through doctorates in literature and school law.)

WN: You attribute your continuing education to your mother, and you said that your father said that eighth grade was enough. Was there—do you remember any kind of tension in the family over that kind of disagreement?

BY: Yes, I think there was. (The tensions might be described as the vision of my mother vs. the practicality of my father.) In those younger days, my father had a job for me as a grease monkey on a rock crusher, and (he assured) me that [at the age of] sixteen I would get a driver's license and I could work [toward] becoming a truck driver. My father was not (particularly) oriented toward (education as such. But) he (did take) correspondence courses (himself) from a famous old correspondence school out of Chicago. He took automotive training and things like that and did very well. But that was all practical, and that all had meaning for him. Yet he never was at ease with our going beyond that, (beyond him). My mother dreamed of our going on. And each of us, (my brothers and I, earned) at least (one) degree. And so I think we must say that it was pretty much my mother's (encouragement). Although in some ways she was not as oriented into the process of learning as one might have expected, she had some sort of (picture) into the finer things of life. At one point she trapped me into taking violin lessons, and this was painful for all concerned. But it lasted for maybe six years. At my demise as a musician I could play things like Minuet in G and Playful Rondo. I played in the high school orchestra. But (during) that crucial time, maybe when I was a sophomore or junior in high school, my music teacher, who was a lovely person and was (later) the concertmeister in the local symphony, said, "It's either (the violin) or football. You've got to choose now." She would have to trim my fingernails and sort of make sure that my hands were not broken or whatever, and it became painful for both of us. So I opted for football. (WN laughs.) This disappointed my mother a great deal. (My brothers, sadly, were even less musical.)

WN: How did your father feel about it?

BY: Oh, he thought it was funny. (He and the Yarberrys generally felt I should become an old-time fiddler.) He never (really) understood. My first violin was given to me by one of my uncles. It was an old hoedown fiddle with a (painfully) raucous tone to it. The high school music teacher was (somewhat) hopeful (and patient) about me. He was a (fine) man, Mr. Stillman was, and he wore a hearing aid. And with that old fiddle, he would turn off the hearing aid sometimes and just coach me on (fingering) techniques. Finally, my mother had put together enough money to (buy) me a nice violin (somewhere) along in this six-year agony. But the fact was that I (nevertheless) became imbued with classical music. And I still have a CD library of classical music. We go to Honolulu to the opera, not for any pretentious reasons, but because we love opera. Beth's mother was (herself) a piano teacher, and Beth is

well versed in music, so that music has stuck with me and changed my perceptions a great deal, (especially with regard to my poetry, and literature in general). But it came from this struggle and almost pathetic maneuvering of my mother to do (what she did). (Neither) of my brothers has skill nor any (particular) interest in music at all, and (they pretty much) resist any sort of (enjoyment of) music.

WN: You talked about your elementary school and your high school being very good, but can you elaborate on that? What was good about it?

BY: Something was different, (like glimpses of a larger universe). I think that it was (largely) a matter of the teachers. The teachers were in teaching because they loved teaching, yes, but also because they had the opportunity (in those times) to be themselves. Little cultural islands in this steel-mill town, if you will. Each teacher whom I remember was like that. The prestige of the teacher, the role of the teacher, was very powerful and meaningful. And students were allowed to find themselves, it seems so, in retrospect. And someplace along the line I began to be thrilled about learning. In very pitiful circumstances because we were (relatively) poor, I would have a little place to write notes to myself and try to write stories and ideate on paper. The local library—the McClellan Library in Pueblo—was a pretty exciting place for us, too, and my mother always arranged for it to be accessible to us. She'd make a library run or whatever. All of this in a context of being poor people across the tracks, (from the south side).

WN: Now, by being poor, was everybody poor or were you—would you consider yourself . . .

BY: Most were poor, (of course, during the Great Depression), and therefore it was more palatable. And the poor and the rich in this high school of—oh, there were (almost) 2,000 students in the high school. I think there were 400 in my senior class. It was a (large) high school. We just had our fiftieth in '88, and (Beth and I) went back for that. And there were 167 of (the class of '38) at the fiftieth anniversary.

So that was (deep) meaning to me in those days. I began to squirrel away little bits of (reflection and) information. I began to be fascinated by writing itself. My high school journalism teacher was a master. He was cross-eyed and a little bit effeminate, maybe, and a loner, but Mr. Stratton was a real pro in teaching journalism and teaching the integrity of journalism. And I've never forgotten that. He took great pride, for example, that (Damon Runyon, the great New York columnist), came from Pueblo. (Mr. Stratton) took pride in this and he took me to an eye-opening—during my senior year—journalism conference at the University of Colorado. And it just turned all kinds of lights of the power of the word to me. I went to [Colorado] School of Mines because that was the cheapest. I would much rather have gone someplace else, but the cost was a factor. My mother had no idea about that. She was just absolutely naive about the whole thing, but pushing and hoping for her sons. So I'd say that the teachers are vivid in my mind as having turned on and opened up, and challenged and injected quality into what we were learning. (Miss Gilliland and Miss Hull, my Latin teachers, Miss Grout, my math teacher, Mr. Atkinson, my physics teacher, and so on.)

WN: Were the teachers from the area?

BY: I'd say pretty much so. (Miss Grout had taught my older brother and my father elementary

math.) But the core of teachers sort of reflected the curious stratification of the society itself. This was a steel-mill town and racial tensions were rampant. (Mexican field workers, southern European mill workers, etc.) You can imagine my mother and father (with) their backgrounds resisting (Europeans, Blacks), and Spanish Americans (even though) Colorado is traditionally and historically a Spanish American land-grant state. But the color lines and the racial lines were very strong, and they were strong in the high school and in the hierarchy of the high school. (Economic status was also a factor.) And this was agonizing in many respects.

My father's brothers were very rowdy-to-criminal types. When I was a junior in high school, one morning I had to walk up the front steps of this huge edifice, having people sort of snickering and so on because [of] the morning headline in the newspaper, "Rodney Yarberry"—my uncle, my namesake—"held on kidnapping charge" was the headline. All of this kind of agonizing about who one was. When I went (back) to the fiftieth (class) anniversary—there (had been) about seventeen Blacks in my high school graduating class—only one showed up. And when he came he asked (specifically) to sit with me. He and his wife sat with my wife and myself and a cousin of mine. There were six of us at this table sort of out of the way. And they had annuals, you know, yearbooks going around, and we opened one. And the Blacks in our graduating class weren't integrated into the picture sequence. They were at the end on a separate page, for example. Now, most of the Italians and the Central Europeans—we called them Bojohns and Wops—they were in the pictures (although) not in the social sense. We had a top coterie of people, (*Haoles*), who were well-to-do and prestigious. And at the fiftieth anniversary, that same group of people sat at a big table and were (mostly) drunk, in the same way that they had been in 1938. In the same sort of pitiful belonging and not belonging. Many of them had never gotten beyond that. Richard Kittrel, this Black, and I, we sat (aside) and we talked, (remembering that) he had wanted to be on the annual staff as I was. He didn't get to be, so we (remembered) things like that.

So it was kind of like a frontier, stratified, divided-against-itself society. We were, (during those years), very conscious of that. My father, (unfortunately), was a racist. My brothers and I are (active) anti-racists. My older brother is a master of perception about racial nuances in our society. He predicted Watts years before it happened, for example. My mother (also) was racist. (One time), a Hungarian girl called me on the phone at my house. My mother asked who it was, and the girl said, "My name is Margaret Toth." My mother just hung up. So I'm really (concerned) about this. This (probably) goes into our having adopted different racial children. And we believe, my wife and I, that love transcends all that. And it has in our family. The most popular among our eight children is Micronesian. you see. We have two blood children now. My wife eventually (found) that she could bear children. So two of our children are blood children and the others are adopted. But we really believe that family ties based upon bloodlines can be a very hazardous thing. Family ties based upon love and compassion transcends and makes an entirely different environment.

WN: So you eventually adopted six children?

BY: Yes. We tried to adopt more. And we've got some (whom) we claim that are not adopted. Our last daughter, we didn't adopt her until she was forty years old. She was born here in Keaukaha, left in a shoe box on (someone's) steps, and (over the years) we kept her. And she is part of our family. But the wife of one of our sons told (this daughter), one time that she

really wasn't a Yarberry. This festered in her soul, one might say. So late in (life) we made the adoption official, because she'd just been ours, and she (had) lived with us in Saipan and Honolulu and so on. So (in 1979) the state of Hawai'i presented to her—gave to us to give to her—a (small) embossed card of her birth, and (it gave the) real birth date, as nearly as can be said. And name of father, Rodney Burl Yarberry; occupation, U.S. Marine Corps. This (would have been) 1943, see, and I was (actually) in the marine corps in '43. And it gave my age at that time. Name of mother (Bethel Faye Yarberry); occupation of mother, housewife; and date of birth, (etc.). She (would have been sixteen) years old, but this was the birth certificate that Pat, our daughter, (received), you see. We didn't ask for that (certificate). They just sent it to us. (Someone in the bureau of statistics was very, very thoughtful.)

WN: You mentioned that your teachers were like islands of culture amongst a steel town. Now, when you're talking about racism and so forth, were they so-called broad-minded, non-racist people that sort of helped instill that in you?

BY: I think so. I think the seeds were (planted) there. Now, they—I'm not talking Simon-pure, nor simplistically, I'm saying that they were oriented this (enlightened) way. When I was in kindergarten I just didn't come home one day, and they found me in the home of a Black family, because I just loved this little Black girl. And that's where they found me. My teacher, a *Haole* lady, thought that was just marvelous. She wasn't aghast, and she just said to my mother, who called her in concern about where I was, "Well, I think, the last I saw him he was with so-and-so. She's a little Black girl." And of course my mother flinched, I (suspect). When I got home, I remember that she was crying, but she said years later she'd been crying because she thought of the tragedy when this little girl (eventually) realized, sometime in her (early) life, that she was Black. So it was working on my mother. My mother was a strong Christian.

But my father's family (was something else). Some of them were border guards along the Rio Grande River and boasted about how many Mexicans they'd killed. So there was this kind of frontier atmosphere, (as), we're fighting to get the Mexicans driven back to their own country and so on. These were days in which fieldworkers would give birth to children right in the field. I have great empathy for the Spanish American. When I was, say, fourteen—by that time I would leave home a lot. I (would go) for the summer and follow the crop pickers and live (among) Mexicans (and Okies) in southwest (Colorado) harvesting lettuce and picking peas and (jobs) like that. And I lived with the Mexicans, probably in (some) reaction—I don't know. I just don't know.

WN: What did you do to have fun as a kid growing up in Pueblo?

BY: Well, we had what I (thought then) was a very exciting life, without lots of (unorganized or) organized programs. We had a little sandlot football team that we organized ourselves. (We played basketball and softball too.) We played and then formed leagues, or just played somebody from (our) area, (the south side), or played somebody from another area. (It was important) that we had a (small) park near us, and the WPA [Works Progress Administration] built a tennis court (there). And my brothers, especially my younger brother and I, learned to play tennis. We had heated tennis tournaments just on our own. The (life tempo) was (simply) different. It wasn't nearly as organized nor as well done. (Eventually), I coached tennis some when I was here at this campus, (largely because of my boyhood athletics).

WN: UH [University of Hawai'i] Hilo?

BY: Yes. (Another activity) was golden glove boxing. (It) was in, and we, (my brothers and I), boxed. But these were all things that were sort of (incidental to our lives)—it wasn't nearly as neatly organized and showy. (We seldom) had uniforms and we never had good equipment. But you had all these things going on. We lived just across the street from the state fairgrounds, and all year round they trained horses there. Now, in those days, they trained running and trotting horses. And almost anytime I could go over and get a job as a lead boy to lead horses after they'd been exercised. So there were (sidelines) like that.

I was always fascinated with the open road, and so I left home a lot. I was very young [when] I started doing that. The hazards (of today) weren't there. The opportunities weren't there either, but the hazards of transportation and all of the hazards a young person faces now weren't there really. You just kind of made your (own) way. And I liked (the) different kinds of people, and I just felt that (the world was an exciting place).

WN: So you graduated in '38 from . . .

BY: High school, right. (Central High School in Pueblo.)

WN: . . . and you went to the Colorado School of Mines.

BY: Right. (That was in 1938.)

WN: Did you have any idea what you wanted to pursue at that time?

BY: No, as I (remember), it was (simply) the cheapest school. (And) one of my older cousins was (enrolled) there in [Colorado] School of Mines, and so I got a job cooking in what was called Prof. Douglas' Penthouse. An old (English) professor ran a (small) boardinghouse for the boys and let them work their board and room out. So I cooked in Prof. Douglas' Penthouse and I got my meals and, I think, twenty dollars a month. I got a hundred dollars at the beginning of each semester from my mother, and that took care of—tuition per semester was about ninety dollars. And I (earned) my board and room. For the first two years there I slept in a kind of a roomy closet. There was no big deal about it. The class system that I knew about—people with money and people without—didn't bother us (then). About once a semester, well, maybe like at Christmas, I got to get on the train and go home to Pueblo. And in [Colorado] School of Mines you went twelve months a year. It was a five-year course in four years. So I took my plane surveying the first summer, and the next summer mine surveying, and so on. But I didn't like mining, and I didn't like that kind of (mechanical) intellectualizing. I eventually (realized) that.

WN: When you go to a school like that, is that how—you're slotted already to get a degree in mining engineering and then going from there? I mean, there's no semblance of a liberal arts type of curriculum.

BY: No, (absolutely not). The only liberal arts or humanities course there was, (I think), one semester of literature. There were three semesters of English and that's absolutely all. Everything else was engineering (and ROTC). And the nearest that might have come was a

course in economics. But that's all. Metallurgy, mineralogy, geology, geophysics, all of these—physics and chemistry, of course—all of these science things (and mathematics through integral and differential calculus).

So, my brothers are sterling examples of what the school produces. They're engineers with (few) corners knocked off. No humanities sensitivities at all. They're bright engineers. They have been world-class engineers. My younger brother was vice-president for mining for Dillingham [Corp.], at one time, here in Honolulu and in Australia. He was in charge of their Australian ventures and their Alaskan ventures and so on. They (both) worked all over the world, my brothers, as topnotch engineers, but really were (blighted somewhat) in matters of sophistication and matters of (the) humanities and so on. And my younger brother never (really went beyond) that. He's been president of mining companies and so on, but he never rose (beyond these) dimensions of intellectual activity. They both made lots of money, of course. But they have lived what I must say were (rather) blighted lives. My older brother and his wife (are retired in Knoxville). For the past (several) years (my younger brother) has been married to a wonderful Chinese Jamaican lady. But a rocky road they've traveled, as far as the sensitivities and the (attachments to) a (particular) society and that sort of thing. They've lived (pretty much) in the macho world of the engineer.

WN: When did you decide that English is the field that you wanted to get into?

BY: Well, I (really) always yearned for that (option). And the old prof whom I mentioned at [Colorado] School of Mines was an English prof. And he gave me (further) glimpses. He took (us) to concerts. He took (us) to nice restaurants, (etc.). He was a sensitive man. He'd been wounded in World War I, and he died soon after I went [overseas during] World War II, about the first year of the war, (I think).

So, (with regard to English), I would say that I (began to know) early on that it was fascinating to record ideas and to (write) fictional situations and so on. But (nevertheless I was) so ignorant of the nuances of that. I changed [course and] took a degree at Western State College [of Colorado], and I went on to University of Arizona and made the switch—I mean, in an educational sense—and took a master's degree in American and English literature. And (I began) to write papers for seminars and (course work, and), it was just hilarious to (fellow students) to see this interface when I would analyze a poem in a mathematical way or in an engineer's way, you see. The transition, I'm saying, from a technical education to (becoming) a humanities one was very difficult. There were a few other World War II veterans with me, and we had (developed) a coterie of fellow sufferers. One of those, who was a navy pilot in World War II, is Will Bryant, who is (today) a marvelous novelist, and has been for many years. (Another) of my friends there who helped design the space capsule—(laughs) took a master's degree in English and was an incredibly (sensitive) poet. So we were on that sort of ragged edge of ignorance (WN laughs) and it was a very difficult (transition). When I went on to take a doctorate in English literature . . .

WN: At [University of] New Mexico?

BY: At New Mexico. Oh, (by then, after four years of secondary school teaching), it was quite different. But you see, my technical training (even then) made me sort of awesome to the teachers. Because they were used to an esoteric and dilettante-ish approach to all this

(literature), and when we, (my friends and I), hit this kind of track, we were (more) organized. I don't think I had over one or two B's in all my graduate work. Because we were tough (academically, I think). We had been toughened to another approach, you see, but hopefully we became (more) sensitized to beauty and to intricate thought based upon skills in language.

WN: So you're saying then that because of your background, your technical, so-called—I guess—blue-collar background coupled with your interest in fine arts and English and so forth, is that what you would consider the ideal in a human being, or—I mean, what you're saying really is that there's good points to both sides, right?

BY: Oh, yes. I'm not . . .

WN: Both approaches helped you.

BY: Yes. And I was just fortunate enough to have gotten pretty deeply into (these) opposing styles. And (in retrospect) this has all sorts of ramifications. This is why, in an educational system, the teacher must be very, very sensitive to not (roil) the reservoir that they're all drinking from, couching (things) in one way or another in his or her own biases. Because learning is too exciting for that. I'm talking about people who became excited about learning. Oh, (I remember) we had marvelous learning (arenas). At Arizona I was taking a seminar in literary criticism. And the professor was a very prissy and pedantic man. And because this school was in Tucson, many of the winter people were celebrities from, say, New York. One of the wonderful (literary) critics of that day and time was Joseph Wood Krooch of the *New York Times*. He came to Tucson for a winter and was invited to our seminar. And Dr. Muir said—he (had) warned us, "I'm talking, Yarberry, to you and to Bryant and to (Goodenough). You guys lay off of this man and don't get smart. You keep your mouths shut." Well, I loved the library there and it was like a new world to me to have access to the stacks in a marvelous library. So way in the back of the stacks, one morning before this seminar was to take place, here's this guy sitting at a table back there. And I don't know if he was trying to do this or not, but he knocked a book off on the floor, and I turned from the stacks and picked it up and put it back. And he began to talk with me, and it was Joseph Wood Krooch. And we just found all kinds of exciting things to talk about. And he knew that I knew and felt the style of [Ernest] Hemingway, we'll say, and the rage was on then (as to) whether Hemingway should even be taught in a school of literature. No kidding. And one of the . . .

WN: Let me turn the tape over.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

BY: Another exciting literary event of the time was *Death of a Salesman*. Joseph Wood Krooch had written the most important critique of *Death of a Salesman*. So, first, (however), he got

into me on Hemingway, and I knew Hemingway—I mean, I knew Hemingway's works in a engineer's way—and so we had a real little encounter there. And so (after that encounter) I said, "We're really looking forward to your being with us in the seminar." And I said, "I hope the professor doesn't dampen you out."

He said, "Oh, I know, I've seen (professors before)." And then he said, "We'll just have some fun."

So we did. We just turned that (seminar) into what for him was a brilliant performance for us, and drawing us out. It was three hours of one of the most exciting encounters intellectually I've ever had. And Muir was furious. He was (practically) livid with rage.

WN: What was he afraid of?

BY: In the first place, we had gotten out of (his) control. There were probably ten people in the seminar, and maybe six or seven of them were World War II veterans. And it had gotten beyond this man and his sheltered little world, you see. Dr. Muir was just crushed by this whole thing. It was one of the most exciting seminars I've ever participated in. So, I'm just saying that . . .

(Taping interrupted, then resumes.)

BY: So what I'm saying is that intellectual encounters with (all) children—I remember my kindergarten teacher hugging that little Black girl, and I remember the vivid contrast between her white arms and the little Black girl's arms and legs. But that woman loved, and she had transcended (the biases) that this teacher had had. She gave me (just) a glimpse of transcending (pinched minds and hearts). It just didn't matter. (Anyhow) I just went on home with that little girl, later on. And I remember the mother, Black mother, was teary-eyed and worried that something would happen to them because I'd shown up, and that kind of (fear).

What I'm saying is that at any level, the arena for learning must be exciting. Late in my years, my mother told me, "Burl, I really think that you're a great teacher, and I (myself) really didn't understand that." So all of that has (been) reflected in my belief about education, my belief about (open) socialization, my belief about man's (very) destiny. This, I'm sure, must seem like a kind of a shotgun, unorganized way of having developed. But somehow I became imbued with the idea of thinking more and more largely. Every person's life must be seen more and more largely. This (idea) appeals to children, if they haven't been coerced or threatened or—or keep the seminar in order for Dr. Muir. He had had a neat page of notes, and he was going to pose questions for Joseph Wood Krooch to talk from, to talk toward. Krooch said at the end, "Folks, I don't (know that) I'd be welcome to come back, but I'll tell you what, when I get back to New York I'm going to tell (my friends) about this session we had. (It has been) very exciting (for) me, and very hopeful."

But I (probably) made a life-long enemy in that man, (the professor). For a short time, he (became) editor of the *Arizona Quarterly*. And I sent poetry to them, and none ever got published in those days. Then another one of my professors, (Albert Gegenheimer), became editor and was editor for many years, and he did publish some of my poems, you see. I'm just saying that you can approach learning as something (in which) not to muddy the water.

I'll tell you about two classes at Western State (College). The (insecure) physics professor at first tried to bully me intellectually. When he found he couldn't do that, he (actually) said, "If you will—I want you to come and see me." I went to see him. He said he didn't want me in the class anymore.

And I said, "Why not?"

He said, "You're disruptive. If you will go to the board right now and derive the sine law and the cosine law, I'll give you a B in the course, and don't show up anymore." (Laughs) That's the only B I got (in those days).

WN: (Laughs) I guess he did it then. (Laughs)

BY: He did it. He did. I went to the board and derived the sine law and the cosine law. And I had found that he was a mountebank. He was a phony (guy). In intricate matters of reasoning in physics, he (just) couldn't handle it.

WN: This was at the Colorado School of Mines?

BY: No, this was at Western State. And at School of Mines, I had done quite well in physics, better in physics than in chemistry. So I knew physics. But it intimidated this man because he really wasn't very good in physics and he had his own little routine, his own little thing. So I'm saying that learning never stops. And having people in grades, and moving on in grades and being graded—really inhibits this matter of openness and seeing more largely. I'm just in some really exciting and intricate reasoning and research (in this regard) right now.

We have a little cabin in Colorado, and (my wife and I) were there (last summer). On Sundays we'd come in to go to a little church in the little town, a little ranching town. And this young couple came up to us, and the girl said, "My father lives in Hawai'i."

I said, "Well, we're from the Big Island."

She said, "He's on the Big Island. But he won't write to us, and he won't answer our letters. And he's never seen a picture of our beautiful little kids."

Bethel said—and Bethel's always reaching out to help somebody—"Well, if you'll bring us a picture next Sunday, we'll take it and make sure that it gets to your father." And we did. About a week or two weeks ago—we found the guy up at Volcano, went up there to see him. He is a fabulous man. He's Hungarian, (I think). He's a former nobleman and was very wealthy at some time in his life, his past. And he and his Hawaiian wife live at Volcano. They were cordial but reserved. (Thinking), what do these people (really) want, you know. And so we just chatted along, and pretty soon Bethel explained that we'd met his daughter at the church and that she wanted us to get in touch with them and that she loved her father very much and wishes he would write.

And he said to us, "I don't like her. She's a troublemaker."

Bethel said, "Well, surely you love her?"

"Yes," he said, "I love her (but I don't like her. She tries to run my life, to tell me how to think. She's a spiritual bully)."

(Beth) just talked right up to the guy and we saw him as he really was. Well, it turned out to be a (fine) intellectual encounter on other matters. I'm reading Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, the French philosopher, Jesuit philosopher. Very exciting view. He was a paleontologist, but he's a very exciting man about the universe (at large). So I brought this up. Yes, the (old) guy had read him. First thing we know, we're really crossing intellectual views. And the (old) guy began to warm up, and the first thing you know, why, we just—we went there at nine o'clock, and we thought, well, we won't stay but maybe fifteen or twenty minutes, or just say hello. Well, twelve o'clock we were still there. We just had a marvelous visit. I brought three of his books home and. . . . See, what I'm saying is that if you can see more largely—and (in the initial tension) we didn't draw off. Bethel had him laughing about this, and he was very candid with us. And this marvelous Hawaiian lady is (one of his latter-day wives), and he calls her his ultimate trophy wife (laughs). We found that they had whimsy and sense of humor and he's well read and she's quite an intelligent and lovely person in her own right.

A very exciting encounter, do you see? But if we had been uptight and with our own agenda, with no give and take. . . . In our school systems we make the teacher have (the system's agenda, not) her or his own agenda. The whole (approach) mitigates toward (sameness). You know, national testing and all of these things mean that you and your children and I and my children all have to have taken the same things. First thing you know, it eats away at the well-being of the whole society, and its vigor. Its vigor is inhibited by that. Well, [through] encounters like this—and I have them all the time—unexpected things flower out if one is seeing largely. And if I can just teach a student to see largely, that's worth the game.

Our youngest daughter just back from the—I think when you were here before she was in Africa in the Peace Corps. She's back. Lovely, lovely probing mind, seeing largely. She's a different person. She spent much of her life in Indonesia. And she's got wonderful French, as a language. She's got Japanese. Really a sophisticated probing mind trying to see largely. Saw herself in perspective in that situation. She went over there (to Togo in East Africa) and her major assignment was to help the natives build a bridge between two villages. She's no engineer, but she didn't quail, you know. She didn't stop. She just went right on and helped them progress in something that she could see largely enough to see (truly). One of the major problems she saw right away was that the material that they had gathered to build the bridge disappeared before they could get the concrete poured or whatever. So the first thing she did was build a large (secure) holding pen to keep the materials intact in order to get the bridge done. Now, this took seeing largely to do that. A year ago we went to see her in Africa. And she just—I tell you, she had a tremendously exciting time there. (Not just with the bridge but with the people.)

She had known batik painting from Indonesia, so she taught the women batik painting in their weaving in the villages. Oh my goodness, just changed lives, and the women just worshipped her because she saw this, and it (hadn't been) anticipated. But first thing you know, she's giving them (a larger) artistic view, or helping them design a new little stove instead of the three-stone cooking that they were doing in their huts; giving them some reasoning about where to locate the village well; what to do to protect the edge of the well. Things like that. Logic, you know, and seeing largely.

WN: Was she educated here?

BY: Most of her elementary and secondary [education] was in the international school in Jakarta. But her university work was at the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma. And so she has a large view of the universe. I'm not saying that she's all-knowing, but she has the anticipation to continue to learn and to continue to see things more largely.

WN: Now, you started teaching over at a high school [in 1950].

BY: Yes, I went there [Ouray High School] to teach sciences and mathematics.

WN: Not English?

BY: Well, very quickly I began to teach English, too. And then I sponsored the yearbook and the newspaper and directed the plays, things like that. And coached boxing.

WN: When you came in, did you have your philosophy of education pretty much? How did you decide to become a teacher, first of all?

BY: I felt very strongly that I didn't want to—I had done some mining, and it's (hazardous) and seems destructive and very tenuous, and I (simply) didn't want that. My mother (had) said, "Burl, I've always thought you would be a good teacher." Well, it rang (right) to me, so I went to Western State to get my credentials as quickly as I could. And I got them. And curiously, (I had had) two of the most inspiring teachers I've ever had anyplace at Western State College. I'm saying that it isn't the size of the school, nor degrees, nor the prestige (of a school), but it's the excitement about learning. I mean these (two) guys were world class in that regard. One of them came to me one morning, and he said, "Burl, I went over the papers last night, and I've had to give you twenty points above the allotted score of the test." He said, "This is the most exciting paper I've read." Well, he wasn't threatened (or threatening), he wasn't relegating. He was seeing largely.

The president of Western State, whom I got to know as a friend over the years, later, said, "You are either the worst or the best teacher we've ever turned out here."

(Laughter)

BY: My critic teacher, when I did my practice teaching at the high school, just thought I was terrible. She absolutely thought I was a renegade and dangerous. But eventually I cornered her into seeing what she was doing wrong—if I may say—and I got an A for my practice teaching. But at one point she had said that she wouldn't handle me anymore. This was when the president had called me in and said that. Anyway, those two teachers were unexpected and. . . . One of them was in English literature. He had me reading and declaiming Shakespeare and all kinds of things that I didn't know I could do. And he brought a vividness to the classroom that was very, very exciting. And yet, he was considered quite eccentric. He was considered unreliable, and so on.

But anyway, I went into teaching, and it felt right. Upon my finishing at University of Arizona, I think, I looked for a job in Colorado. And had an interview in Ouray, Colorado.

So I went up there, and the guy who came into this room to interview me, I'd played football with at [Colorado] School of Mines. He was what we called in those days a "little all-American." His name was Marvin Katzenstein. By this time, though, he'd changed it to Marvin Kay and was chairman of the board of education in this town and hired me. And we had quite an encounter, because he had beat me up terribly on the football team (WN laughs). And so I came to Colorado for my first teaching. And Bethel had taken her degree at what is now Northern Colorado State at Greeley, and she'd taught at Steamboat Springs in Colorado. So, the way it worked out, both of us had jobs. We had no children. We both got jobs there in Ouray. And I think it was in that first year, my science room, and where I (also) taught journalism, was downstairs and away from the main flow and activity of the school. And because there were lots of mining companies around there and I knew (some) of the miners, my laboratory was just superb. Oh my, I had all kinds of equipment, all kinds of supplies. (And) it was away from the mainstream. It was a divided room with laboratory on one side and (seating) on the other. And I had a marvelous setup. I was (quickly) in my haven, it was so marvelous.

WN: Were you considered a renegade-type teacher there?

BY: Well, we set lots of fires that have burned for some of their grandchildren, but it was an exciting time. I didn't mix so much with the rest of the school, and one day the superintendent came and said, "Burl, I want you to take over as principal of the high school."

I said, "Oh"—his name was A. J. Cotner—I said, "A. J., I can't do that I don't have any . . ."

He said, "You were in the marine corps, weren't you?"

I said, "Yes, I was in the marine corps."

He said, "Well, the kids have taken over the school."

And I said, "Really? I didn't know that. My own classes are just going really well." Anyway, I went home to tell Bethel and she said, "Well, you don't know anything about (school) administration." (Laughs) She told me that [same thing] right in this very room, right here, when the (Hawai'i state) superintendency came up, too. And so my wife's always been my toughest critic (WN laughs). But a good one. And so, anyway, I became principal. The first morning, Monday morning, I went up, walked through the halls, and I suspended seventeen students. Told them to get out. "Get out, and don't come back until you bring your parents." Fairly quickly we restored order, and so I continued as a teaching principal. I had to knock off something. But I think I must've knocked off the sponsorship of the paper and the yearbook. But anyway, I taught the full array of science and continued one English, I think senior English or something like that.

WN: Was there a big difference between pure teaching and getting into administration and teaching?

BY: Well, we tend to think that they're different categories, but maybe they're not (so much). I learned that when you're swept up in the ebb and flow of the school, lines blur out. We try to

make neat packages of everything, not only in our teaching but in our teacher training and in our educational system, without seeing largely and seeing beyond the borders of this (or that) set of constraints, whatever they may be. And this guy, (A. J.), just let me go, and we began to have a marvelous time. I was there four years [1950-54]. My ideal was, in those days, to be a Mr. Chips and be there forever. And I could've done that. Bethel and I developed and ran a mountain-climbing club there. Marvelous experience in that during the summers. We had people from mountain clubs all over the world come and climb on the San Juan Mountains. Twenty-two of the fifty-two 14,000-foot peaks in Colorado, (I think) are in those San Juan mountains. So we had climbs of all different kinds for (mountain clubs) coming. At 11,000 feet, I established a boarding house and made my own water supply and so on. It was a marvelous thing, and we made (relatively) lots of money. Some (of the clubs) said they would loan me money if I wanted to make a lodge up there and have climbing forever. But we moved on, you see. We moved on to other things. I think it's fair to say that we've tried in our lives to see and to keep growing, keep growing. And so I got this senior fellowship at [University of] New Mexico and went there.

WN: For your Ph.D. studies.

BY: Yes.

WN: This was back in '54.

BY: Fifty-four I think, right.

WN: How did you feel about leaving teaching at that point?

BY: It twisted my heart. But it wasn't like I was closing the door. And most of the kids whom I'd been so close to had graduated and gone on. One of the boys of that first year, I think, graduated, and went to the University of Colorado and flunked out, and called me on the phone in tears. His father was a mining engineer, and this was a terrible stigma against the boy for having flunked out of University of Colorado. And so he said, "What do you think I should do?"

I said, "Well, at this stage, you're not going to get back in CU next semester. Why don't you go into the military?" So he joined the marine corps, because he knew I (had been) in the marine corps. And all through his boot camp he wrote these terrible letters to me, threatening me and hating me and so on. But gradually he finished his marine corps (tour very well) and he went back to University of Colorado, got his degree, and went back to Ouray and taught the very same courses I had taught. And that was a very, very intriguing thing. For many years now, he's been with the U.S. Bureau of Mines in Grand Junction, Colorado. We stopped to see him, and he's now bald-headed and has grandchildren. (WN laughs.) We both laugh about this train of events, but it was high irony for me to think of what happened to him.

WN: Okay, well why don't we get into your decision to come over to Hilo back in '57. I guess you got through two years of your Ph.D. work done. How'd that come about?

BY: I finished my residency, took my orals . . .

WN: In English.

BY: In English. And I scouted around. I had inquiries as to where I could go. I had agreed to go to the University of Washington.

WN: This is to teach or to finish up your dissertation?

BY: No, to teach. In those days, I was a viable (instructor) candidate in those days, you see, in that circumstance. The University of New Mexico was what we called the "Harvard of the West" in English, (at least), in those days. Very strong graduate program. And many of my peers did not pass the orals. But I was in things I liked and did well. So anyway, University of Washington and several other schools, and kind of as an afterthought I wrote to University of Hawai'i. Kind of a dream of my re-entry into the Pacific and feeling I had for the distances and the peoples of the Pacific. And of course, I had a cable or a telegram from University of Washington when I should come, and then at the last minute in Albuquerque, I had a cable from Hawai'i, Mānoa campus. Charlie Bouslog was the chairman of the English department in those days and offered me a job. And so, I begged off at Washington. I came to Hawai'i and I taught summer school (at Mānoa) that year. And Charlie Bouslog said, "They need somebody in Hilo because they're closing that thing down, you know. I'd like to have you go over there and help them close it down."

WN: They were going to close down UH-Hilo?

BY: That was the (marching orders) I got, because there was a strong feeling with the people in the liberal arts, and it was a strong feeling with the people in the College of Education (and the College of Agriculture), that Hilo was a dead pigeon. Well, Frank Inouye was head of the campus (here). And by the time I got over here in, say, August, I may be a little wrong in dates and so on, but Frank Inouye, one of the first things he told me was that he was leaving and that a guy in business administration named Roger Mosley was taking his place. Frank had given up. He went on. He (became) assistant dean for general studies in Mānoa campus. Very able guy, incidentally, and a really big thinker, but he (thought) that it was a losing cause here, and he'd done his best.

WN: Now, coming over from Mānoa and being asked to help close it down, what did that mean? How did you perceive that?

BY: Well, my approaches are always a mixture of naivete and sensing, and so I have to be very (cautious). All my life, I've come in open-eyed and starry-eyed. But it wasn't too long before I found, oh, about four or five guys of high caliber. Maurice Tatsuoka, still a world-class mathematician. Jack Easley, one of the best American scholars on Japanese education anyplace. So there were just a sprinkling of these big (caliber) guys, who for one reason or another, largely emotional, were here. And (much) later on, (as director) I brought some startling people to the campus here, including Edward Teller, and Zolton P. Deans, one of the most exciting teachers of (mathematics) ever. But what I'm saying is that these guys (and the chemistry) began to turn me around in my thinking. So that's one thing that happened. Another thing that happened was that in some of my classes, I began to make connections with and have rapport with some (of the local) Japanese (American) businessmen. Stanley Hara, (for example), was one of our students. The fact was that there were Japanese

American guys who—quite a number of them were in the 442nd [Regimental Combat Team] and different things like that. They were tough guys, but they knew they were lousy in English. So for several of the years I was here, on a volunteer basis, I taught them businessman's English. I (even) taught at chamber of commerce orientations in political involvement. Quite a number of times we had Dan Inouye come to tell us about his techniques on political campaigning. But these businessmen—and one of them went to become the state head of social security. There were a lot of classy guys who just couldn't write. And voluntarily, not with any (enrolled) classwork or anything like that, I began to—at least once a week, sometimes twice a week over a period of time—run writing classes for them. And this was aside from the (formal) university (work). And guys like Maurice Tatsuoka and Jack Easley also began to regard the university as something larger than the people at Mānoa envisioned. And someplace along that line—because Kazuhisa Abe was chairman of the senate [ways and means committee, William] "Doc" Hill was the president of the senate, and Stanley Hara was the chairman of the house finance committee—first thing you know, we had some political clout. And we worked on the theory that the neighbor-island folks could outclass the O'ahu guys and make some political trades and so on. I remember witnessing that the Hilo campus should be one of the repositories for the Library of Congress. Each state got three, and when statehood came, we were going to get three. And of course, one would be Mānoa, and another one would be someplace in O'ahu, maybe. But why not one here. We wrung that out of them, and this [UH-Hilo library] became a repository for the Library of Congress, long before it was much of a library. But the first thing you know, the next legislative session we got money for a new library up here. We began to get money. We got sponsorship for a new land grant for this school, (400) acres or something like that. Got it through the legislature. First thing you know, this was a real burr under the saddle blanket for the Mānoa people. And there was all kinds of intrigue that went on, on that kind of thing. I can express it like this. One time in the [*Honolulu Advertiser*], there was a political cartoon with me standing with my hand behind my back. And I'm talking to President [Lawrence] Snyder of the university. And behind me I'm holding one of these caveman clubs with four points on it, and the caption is, "President Snyder, I have four points to discuss." Well, we put this (campaign) on that kind of a basis. We said that, in any sort of reconstituting of the university, we have four points to discuss. So it became a political movement.

END OF SIDE TWO

TAPE NO. 21-28-1-91; SIDE ONE

WN: Now, if we can back up just a little bit. You came to Hilo as an English instructor. Then you eventually, in the short time you were there, you became chair of the faculty.

BY: Yes, that was an elected thing in those days. And the faculty elected me chairman. Then I became the head of the campus.

WN: Now, when you were there as an English instructor and chair of the faculty, was UH Hilo still going down the tubes? What was UH-Hilo like when you arrived?

BY: Nice atmosphere and so on and the kids were really in earnest. They were largely local kids,

but we did have a sprinkling of Micronesians in those days. We had people like John Mangofel and Petrus Toon, [who] is now governor of Yap, and people like that here. We nurtured this and we saw ourselves as being an outpost of access to higher education for Micronesia. We began to see visions like this, you see, and we began to say so. (And we pushed for excellence with the local kids too.)

We did other things that were criticized by Honolulu. For example, one morning I was just sitting in my office up there and a phone call [came] from Peace Corps, Washington. And he said, "Are you in charge there up at the campus?" (He seemed to know about the campus, its size, its location, etc.)

I said, "Yes."

And he said, "Would you be willing to take on some Peace Corps trainees?"

I said, "Yes, we would." And we talked a little bit. I said, "The first year the kids would have to sleep in the gymnasium. That's all we've got. We don't have much (in the way of) facilities (yet)." Well, eventually Peace Corps became viable. But Governor [William F.] Quinn was (angry at first), because that got away from him (or through him). It should have been at Mānoa or some other [place].

If I make any point with you, one of the strongest points I can make is that the educators, the people in the trenches, have never really been the ones who made the paramount decisions in this state. The governor did, the lieutenant governor and the people in the legislature. And that's why we've slipped (so much), because (the political office holders) don't have this excitement of learning and the empathizing with learners and with teachers which is needed in order to make an educational system outstanding.

So we lost the first class [of Peace Corps volunteers] because the governor said I was out of line. But then we got the next one, and pretty soon it was a regular thing. And they (did sleep) first in the gym. And (then) we rented a public school up the coast for one summer's class of Peace Corps.

WN: I assume that in those days UH-Hilo was not an integral part of the UH system.

BY: Not really. (Yet) every Monday I got on a plane and went over [to UH-Mānoa] and sat at the lower end of the table and listened at the dean's council.

WN: Were you dean status?

BY: Yes. But way down the pole, you see, and (tolerated, so to speak). Yet I was just not really very well accepted. And the prim and proper guys, Willard Wilson and Dean [Edmund] Spellacy and all of those guys, held things in (check). What I'm saying is that the vision (simply) wasn't there. And so, not by any conscious (effort) or by any preconceived idea, we brought the legislative (power) into the picture, because this was our only entrée. Governor Quinn hardly knew where we were over here. And it was just a very (negative) image (to overcome).

WN: So you looked at the legislature to try and bring Hilo . . .

BY: That's one of the ways. Peace Corps was another. Another (small) way---I sat in my office one (morning), and I began to think about people who might well come here, for summer (session), we'll say. Well, (we) had Hubert Humphrey, (we) had Edward Teller. And they just had a marvelous time. (We) had them meet in seminars with businessmen and things like this. I began to try to recruit (stronger staff). But, of course, Mānoa campus never helped on the recruiting. They would (more or less) give us (castoff) goods from there. If they wanted to get rid of somebody, they'd try to shuffle them over here and that kind of thing. Nobody who (caught) the vision (at first). Well, we had this little (group) of guys who had the vision and fought for it. And that included some really good scholars here, but it wasn't endorsed and encouraged in a full visionary way, to my way of thinking, (by the chiefs at Mānoa).

WN: Would you say, was it [UH-Hilo] more considered like a trade school?

BY: Well, it was an embarrassment mostly. It was an embarrassment in education (as far as they were concerned). And it was an embarrassment because in the system the president of the university in those days (had to go) to the legislature and appear for his budget hearings. And the guys in the budget [committee], the legislators, had a terrible time making (the administration) focus on what was happening in Hilo (campus), what could happen in Hilo. I remember making a presentation one time about the vision of the Mauna Kea observatories. Hey, they just laughed. "Don't be ridiculous. [There is] Mount Palomar and the University of Arizona. Who would come out here?" Or, "How would you get a road up there?" And all kinds of things, you see. Not seeing the vision. Well, [today] it's world class, and maybe the world's outstanding center now for looking out at the universe. And we saw that, (dimly perhaps). We were just naive enough. It takes a certain naivete, too. It isn't a matter of just bringing everybody along. But (I think) I've lived my (whole) life like that.

When I was in this one little camp of Mexicans down in southwestern Colorado, I slept under the wagon of a Mexican family. It was big, like a covered wagon. Every Sunday we'd pool money and go buy a *Denver Post*. It was a big, thick *Denver Post* newspaper, and it had the cartoons (the funnies). The reason everybody chipped in and it was a part of all of us was because I'd sit under the wagon on Sunday morning when they'd get back from town and read the funnies to them. All of the Mexican kids around listening to me, and (I would) make (acting) gestures and read the funny papers. And then read [other] things, too, (of course), and try to explain to them, to the fathers and mothers, (what was out in the world, what was possible for them). Now, that was no big deal, but it was the excitement of learning. It underlined (for me) that if those kids had a chance (to see the universe). . . . But nobody ever thought of that. There was no schooling for them. They couldn't (even) enter a local school, anything like that.

So, if you carry that (idea) on. . . . We did that in my public school teaching. We had that same sort of drive, of seeing new things and believing that this person could do this or that. There was one old man who lived next to the high school (in Ouray). And I could look out of my office—I had a principal's office upstairs—and on the snowy days I could see this house next door. And these people were (almost) literally starving to death. And the little kids—there were five of them in the school, and they just had old ragged shoes and (coats.) And I knew Frank, the guy, and I (visited with) him. That next spring, he went out and he

found a uranium mine [in] 1952. The government was encouraging all kinds of subsidies for the discovery of uranium in the West. And Frankie went out and discovered uranium on the Colorado plateau. They (called) him to Denver, (to the regional office, Bureau of Mines), and his first check was for \$6 million. Now, this just blows your mind. And when he came home he had shoes for every one of his kids, new shoes, and he had wrist watches (and coats) for every one of his kids. And we used to talk a lot, and he—he's dead now, (I think), but he more or less handled (this wealth) much better than one would expect. Within months he had another \$5 million. Just incomprehensible for that time and place. But he took care of his children. (As they became older), he put his children into good schools. They bought a nice home there (in Ouray). (Early on,) he went down to Grand Junction and bought a jeep (station wagon). Eventually he bought a Cadillac, but you see, it was hope, (hope for his family, which they handled pretty well).

So I'm just saying that if you stay open, one would be surprised at the opportunities that can come. Now, you can't always even perceive them, but I am a strong believer that this same thing happens in the classroom. And if I've got all kinds of constraints on me as a teacher, if I've got all kinds of delimiting factors, and I'm worried about my load and I'm worried about other things and I'm distracted into regimentation, I'll lose so much of my enthusiasm for teaching. I'll lose so many of my students. So I believe very strongly that the teacher is the key to the whole thing and that the teachers have to have lots of latitude and encouragement and vision and sense of well-being, and a sense of being important.

WN: As a former high school principal and as a former head of a college—did you, you know, you have this philosophy of letting teachers teach, but at the same time, what kind of guidelines or what kind of groundwork did you lay out for your staff, if any at all? In other words, was it, "Go ahead. We hired you, go ahead and teach," or did you lay some kind of a code on them on what should be taught or how it should be taught or anything like that?

BY: Now, I've thought a lot about this. One of the pronouncements I made someplace along the line as state superintendent was that every person within the Department of Education, every administrator, had to return to the classroom twice per year, with a prepared lesson plan. Everybody, including myself. Now, that's kind of showboating somebody would say. But the fact is it wasn't. It was rearranging attitudes. It was rearranging orientation of everybody, (turning back to the importance of the teacher. We are all designed to learn, actually. And the teacher, the wise empathetic teacher, is the key.)

[Also,] everybody [i.e., teachers] were up in arms about coercing them and making them take additional courses in order to go up the ladder and so on. We just sat down one night, and [designed] parallel tracks for teacher training. Everybody who took teacher training with no griping and no rebelling went on to one track. If you didn't want to do that, with no stigma, you had until a certain date to make up your mind. You could take either track. And anytime you wanted to change your (in-service) track, you let your principal and your district superintendent know. Well, my wife knows that I made (perhaps) hundreds of appearances before faculties all over the state to sell that dual track of in-service training. By the time of the deadline, 90 percent had opted for the in-service track. It was all over then, you see. No big deal about forcing one to take in-service training. No stigma attached to those who didn't, but they were on it (or not), simply and out in the open. I testified on this (program) in the legislature. We had the tracks prepared and the incremental advancement. No problem. Now,

I call that creativity to bring about what needs to be. Teachers need to feel open and adjustable and they need to be learning all the time themselves. The whole establishment that makes decisions about education should know and have a feel for the classroom. That's why we did the other thing. Now, this is not anything remarkable, but it's creative and it (helped change) the atmosphere. I'm saying that one must change the atmosphere. Routine is deadly. The excitement of learning is so important, and it doesn't take lots more money. I do worry, (however), about class load, about the number of students and so on, and that (always) has to be addressed. But these other things, if people can be creative—anytime there's a good school, you know that that principal knows how it is in the classroom. And that those teachers (need) lots of lead time, and they (need room for) initiative that they can take. And they (need) encouragement to meet together and ideate about (their) kids. You'll find that (mutual commitment) in every good school, whether it's public or private. (If a system doesn't have a certain resilience of spirit, enthusiasm, and latitude for creative instruction, then public, open education cannot sustain a society.)

WN: What I'd like to do is to stop here. I sort of wanted to finish up with Hilo, but I think maybe we can pick that up next time, and then we can get into your superintendent years and your philosophy around it. Okay?

BY: Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape Nos. 21-29-2-91 and 21-30-2-91

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

R. Burl Yarberry (BY)

September 19, 1991

Hilo, Hawai'i

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: This is an interview with Burl Yarberry, on September 19, 1991, at his home in Hilo, Hawai'i. The interviewer is Warren Nishimoto.

Okay, Dr. Yarberry, let's start with our second interview. And we were talking about your time at UH-Hilo.

BY: Mm hm.

WN: You started out as an English instructor, then you eventually became chair of faculty, then eventually you were named director, which is today the equivalent of provost, I would say.

BY: Mm hm, mm hm.

WN: Let's talk a little bit about your time there. What needed to be done?

BY: Well, I think that when we were talking, visiting before, I pointed out that the prognosis for the campus was very poor when we came. And I had explicit instructions to help Dr. Inouye, the director, to close it down. The morale of the faculty was very low. Curiously, we did, in those first couple of years, collect some pretty exciting teachers. That helped, and that helped change the atmosphere. And we did some kind of, oh, one might think, foolish things.

For example, we got money for a new library. We had had a library on one end of the cafeteria, and we got money for a new library. We went through the design stage, and we had a local contract, and everything was going pretty well. And we had a gift from some friends of the campus for *kou* wood uprights. The library was designed so that the main reading room had these pillars, or these uprights, along either side of the main reading room. We planned from the very beginning that the *kou* wood would be the pillars. They're tall and stately trees, they're very rare. It's not *koa*, (I think), it's *kou*. It was recognized as a rare wood and a wood ideal for these pillars because they tapered nicely.

One of the ways in which I sold the appropriation for the library was that the students and I would do a lot of it, (that is, auxiliary things). It's about the same time that we got the new land grant for the campus, and we were committed to help clear the land. And we had also

said, rashly I suppose, that we would go down and cut those trees ourselves. And we were ready to do that, and then the trees, of course, just at the time we were about to harvest them and put them up to cure, they were burned out (by a lava flow, or fire).

So, all I'm saying is that little things like this seem fairly insignificant, but it shows that the faculty and the students and the community were swept up in support for this campus. And it really was a community-wide thing. I've told you about the then editor of the *Hilo Tribune-Herald*, a man named A. E. P. Wall, who later on was one of the editors of the Honolulu papers, and a marvelous newspaper man. And I remember his becoming converted to our cause. He had been, as many of the in-people were, resistant and almost disdainful of the development of the campus. But he became a convert. And the students put on a march. They marched from the campus down to the newspaper office in order to thank him for his editorializing in our behalf. This was a kind of a pervasive spirit that I'm talking about. We got some tremendous students in those days. Students from here and some from Maui and a few from outside, but the cream of the studentry, in this island in those days, often ended up there. And we had some marvelous students and some people who went on to remarkable things.

WN: Was it a four-year college back then?

BY: No, at first it was not. And then we worked out give and take with departments over on the other side [i.e., UH-Mānoa]. And I don't think [the College of] Education ever regarded us as qualified. (Maybe they still do not.) And of course, agriculture wouldn't budge about this becoming the ag school for the state, as I still think it should have (become) in those crucial times. I'm saying this remembering that I really wasn't here long enough, as I should have been. I should have stayed longer, in retrospect, with regard to the campus itself. There was a warmth and a loyalty to the campus amongst the faculty. We had some poor faculty, but we had some very good, world-class scholars. They weren't here (so) long, but it (became) a very fine aspiration for a community to have. We became cognizant of the resources of the community itself, the mountains and the rain forest and the diversity of terrain on this island. And there was, amongst a lot of the faculty, an awareness of our opportunity and obligation to students of the other Pacific islands. We talked, perhaps naively, about people of the Pacific. I had the audacity and naivete to think of myself as a man of the Pacific. And so there were lots of aspirations then. As it dwindled off, the good people, Maurice Tatsuoka and Jack Easley and Bob Grinder and people like that, went on to other places. But it was kind of a lapse in the spirit. When I left, I leaned on university decision-making so that Kay Noda—Kaoru Noda—would become the head of the campus—and he was a very sound scholar in his own right—and hoping that it would (be) sustained and developed into a full-fledged state school in its own right and by its own opportunities. So there was lot of that sort of feeling there in those days. (I can't seem to put my finger on what it is now, except to say that we had the spirit, the enthusiasm about our teaching.)

I must say that the general reactions in Mānoa, by the presidents and the vice presidents, was just organically and emotionally and intellectually against this kind of development. They saw this as a threat. As director of this campus, I remember going to hearings and sitting and listening. And you could just hear the edginess and the lack of vision. If I have anything to say about educators, it is they become so compressed and so preoccupied with their own little realm that they dampen out or don't have the capacity for vision. And that's what we sort of

generated in a very small and isolated way (in our heyday). We had the naivete to have vision about what could be done here. And I believe that this kind of stance has to be in every educator's kit, (teacher or administrator. I call that reaching out.)

Another very definite good fortune was that the outer islands' legislators began to coalesce. And in those days, [William] "Doc" Hill was president of the senate. And there were key people and people who worked with, say, with [house speaker] Elmer Cravalho and horse-traded in the house as well, so that the legislators from this island were remarkable in their (gathering) into this outer-island power that became evident then in the legislature. (They were simply superb.)

WN: Did you do a lot of lobbying on behalf of UH-Hilo?

BY: Yes, I did and I continued that very active rapport with the legislature as [state schools] superintendent as well. And I began to get the feel of the rhythm of the legislature and to ideate with people at off-hours or off-seasons about the vision and the potential for the campus, (and other campuses, for that matter). And I really think that if this attitude hadn't turned around for whatever reasons, that this (school) would have dropped out and the whole movement of other campuses and a variety of schools (and opportunity) would have sort of petered out.

Another collaborative thing was that we made friends with the technical school [i.e., Hawai'i Community College]. It was then a technical school. And there were some top-notch people in the technical school. We felt that nurses' training and the marvelous food sciences programs at this technical school were just (first) class. They (even) attracted a European chef and people like that. So that (kind of vigor in Hilo) also dissipated the power of the Mānoa campus.

The Mānoa campus---now you're going to hear some of my other biases. The Mānoa campus, which should be a world-class university, has never quite made it for reasons that I feel could have been, and could be, overcome. There were (images) that (Mānoa) was kind of like a nice summer vacation school. Mānoa campus probably, over the years, has had many opportunities to become world class. And for whatever reasons, not dreaming the large dreams enough, not. . . . I find in any organization—I found this in the United Nations, I (have) found this in many places—the difference in success or mediocrity is the kind of people (who) get swept up into the dreaming and the aspirations for an organization. And there aren't a lot of those people, but they're always around, if they can be brought into some sort of coalescing of and mutuality, where the thrill of development and of excellence becomes evident. This is very difficult to capture, and there are seasons when it can be done and seasons when it can't be done, I'm sure. (When the governance power is so diffuse, and the educational leadership so blurred out and internally contradictory, development is only sporadic at best.)

WN: It seems like the problems that you're stating with the university is similar to, probably, many of the problems that affected the public schools and the Department of Education in this state.

BY: Exactly, exactly. (And the DOE pattern may be even more difficult.)

WN: And I think we can get to that shortly, but what I want to do is just to—let's see, in 1962, let's get you into the superintendent. What happened? How did you get appointed to being superintendent of schools?

BY: Okay. One thing on my side was my naivete. I just had the naivete to think of my little office up there [at UH-Hilo] as being kind of one of the focal points of the world, just seeing so many exciting things. And we seemed to be rolling. Well, one day Dr. [Katsumi] Kometani, the chairman of the board of education, came over. We talked a little bit, and I didn't know what he wanted or anything. And he said, "Burl, we're making a search for a new superintendent." And he said, "This is confidential." But he said, "We have some really tough problems in the Department of Education, and we want you to put your name in as a candidate for the superintendent."

Well, I had---at that time, Ralph Kiyosaki was the district superintendent here. Ralph in those days had a marvelous mind and was a very creative guy. We talked a lot about public schools and so on. I said, "Well, I think the guy you really want to put in is Ralph Kiyosaki."

He kind of brushed that aside for a moment, and he said, "But we'd like to have you put your name in, too."

I said, "Well, I'd like you to know that I would really put my backing for Ralph. I think he would make a marvelous superintendent of schools. He's creative, he's insightful, he understands human aspirations, and so on." Incidentally, we (i.e., Hilo campus) had had really good rap with the public school system.

At this (point), may I interject that there were several very exciting teachers here in the public school system. And I was reaching out and really pressing about the teaching of English (myself), communications, and upgrading community involvement. At that time, there was this tremendous debate about eradicating pidgin. And the people in the speech and English departments at Mānoa campus seemed to me to be out of touch about the reality of how to handle this.

Anyway, Elaine Kono was one of the spearheads, and there was a Mrs. [Shiho] Nunes. Oh, these were top-notch people. Well, we began to put together what later became the Hawai'i English Program, the HEP program. That started just in our ideating right here. These ladies were powerful enough in their own scholarship that they went on with that, and I encouraged them even after I went on to Honolulu. They came up with the HEP program, and the national publishers put this into textbooks. And the HEP program, I've run into in Africa, Indonesia, all over the world, in which the local language was moderated and meshed with excellence in English. And these ladies had that same dream and were excellent scholars in their own right. I think both of those ladies went on to get their doctorates. They were just first-class people. Well, that was the kind of ideas that we tried to stay open with. I'm telling everybody I meet, "Stay open. See largely." I told my pastor that last night. "Got to see largely. Got to see more largely in all that we do."

Anyway, Kome said, "Well, I really want you to think about this now, because we want you. We like your style, and we want you to put your name in."

And I kept saying, "Well, I really want to say that I support Ralph." This was no pledge to Ralph or anything. He and I hadn't talked about this, but I (simply) liked his style of administration.

WN: Now how did you know Dr. Kometani?

BY: I'd never met him before. I'd never met him before.

WN: You had no relations with the school board at all.

BY: No, no. In fact, it was kind of a stunner for him to even come and visit with me. He just, like, came in off the street almost. But I know that he came over to see me. But that was the first time, (I think). He came two or three times [after that]. Anyway, when I came home—we lived in this house—I said to Bethel, my wife, who's my most careful supporter, "You know, they asked me to put my name in to be superintendent of schools." And she thought I meant the island. I said, "No, it's the state superintendent."

She said, "Burl, you can't do that. What experience do you have to do that?"

I said, "Well, I could do it!"

(Laughter)

BY: And so she and I—this is the way the conversation went, you see. And so she's always been my touch with realism. And anyway, I think the second time he came back I said I would, I would allow my name to be put forward.

WN: Now, at that time, were you aware of the enormity of the situation. I mean, it's a high-profile position, even then, right?

BY: It's a high-profile position and seemed unlikely. And I thought, well, it'd just be nice for me to—it's kind of exciting to have been considered. And I thought of all of my checkered career of different jobs and my aspirations. I was aspiring very heavily to be a poet in those days. And I saw myself as a teacher, and in the milieu which we had helped generate here, hey, this is like Mr. Chips. I'll be here all my life, you see. I've always [thought that in] every one of my teaching jobs that I would be Mr. Chips there and spend the rest of my life there. I did this in my first teaching job and regarded myself in that way, to become completely immersed in the teaching and to be the best teacher I could be.

Well, anyway, I know (in retrospect) there was lots of intrigue. And I will allude to the problems later, but there were some real problems that they needed somebody with either a big load of naivete or a big load of courage, because there were some massive personnel problems and so on. And I'll get into that, I suppose, later. But I'm just saying that it tore me up, and yet as completely engrossed as I was in the [UH-Hilo] campus, I didn't think much about it, and I didn't pay any attention. And I know there was lots of shifting. And Ralph came to see me one day, and I told him again, "Now, you know that I'm supporting you for the superintendency."

Ralph never made outright things clear, you know. He always saw things in a sort of an intrigue way. I wanted him to know that I supported him fully and that I had not put my name in, I had not [yet] agreed to have my name considered. He kept saying, "Go ahead, put your name in, anyway." I won't dwell much on that, except that it was (obviously) a matter of his wanting it very badly. He wanted it very much. But he had this—he had a fierce pride, and he had tremendous stature here (on this island). He was unassailable as the district superintendent here, was very creative and he was receptive to ideas. He encouraged Mrs. Nunes, and Elaine Kono to work with us, and we just had a great set of ideas going. And I had a lot of confidence in him.

There were lots of things going on that I had no idea about. I know that Stanley Hara and these local legislators were tapped out and were cognizant of the movement and that sort of thing. You should perhaps remember that Dr. Kometani was one of the few Republicans at that time. He and Quinn were close friends. I'm sure that had an element. I lived in a Democrat community and I explained to them why I was a Republican, partly because my grandfather was a Republican and things like that.

WN: Was it an open thing with you, to state that you were a Republican?

BY: Oh yes, oh yes. I boasted about why I was a Republican. And you know, at the time of statehood I told people, and it was part of the news stories, that I took my students up on Mauna Kea to build a bonfire the night of statehood, because my grandfather had done that in Colorado in 1876. And I was comfortable with the Republican philosophy of government. I didn't sit around and argue politics, I just regarded myself as a Republican in my beliefs about a society. So there was no question about that. At that time, of course, the complete shift into Democratic rule [in Hawai'i] had not [yet] fully taken place, although the legislature was powered by Democrats and young tigers like Dan Inouye and all those guys, and Patsy [Mink] was a mover in education in the legislature. But I never hustled around about it, I just met with them on the issues. You know, if I'd talked with legislators, it was about the issues and not any sort of intrigue of aspiring for political gain of some kind.

WN: Now, you mentioned Governor Quinn at the time, and then you did tell me a story earlier about . . .

BY: The Peace Corps kids.

WN: Other than that incident, did you have any other kind of contact with Quinn?

BY: No. I had no contact with him and I had no idea about relationships and about—I was vaguely aware that Dr. Kometani was a Republican. But that wasn't even a clear issue out discussed or anything like that.

WN: What kind of talk was going on about your predecessor, Walton Gordon?

BY: Well, it was a few weeks later, after I'd been designated, that he came, and I think I told you that he wanted to have me help engineer a trade, so that he would become head of this [UH-Hilo] campus, and I would take his job as superintendent. And I said, "Hey . . ."

(Laughter)

BY: I made an assumption, I said, "Hey, you know how it works. That's way out of any sort of agreement you and I might have."

He said, "Well, you've got a lot of political clout with"—he didn't say it quite this way, but in his own words, he said, "these outer-island legislators are very much on your side, so you could engineer it."

I said, "I don't know. I'm not interested in any sort of talk like that."

I'm not sure now, but that (conversation) could have been before the announcement of the board's decision [to name BY superintendent of schools]. But anyway, Kome called me one night, or we'll say one afternoon. He said, "Burl, please do exactly the way I tell you to do." He said, "Get on the plane, come over and go to the Princess Ka'iulani Hotel. And get a room and get some supper, but stay in your room."

And I did. I went over there. I told Bethel, "I really hate this kind of intrigue and all that."

She still felt that I wouldn't make it and wouldn't be a good superintendent anyway, because I've never had the experience and I didn't have the administrative courses or anything else. She was saying this because she didn't want me hurt. It wasn't that she was putting me down, it was that she's always been my reality, you know. When I've been dreaming big, grandiose things, she's always said, "Well, yes, but. . . ." And then when it happens, why, she's always moved in gracefully and in full support and so on. So it wasn't a carping wife.

But anyway, I went over there and I did exactly that. And about ten o'clock, the phone rang. It was Kome, he said, "Burl, don't talk to anybody. Are there any reporters around?"

I said, "I haven't seen a soul. I don't think anybody knows I'm alive."

And he said, "Take a cab and come up to the pineapple institute." They were meeting in a board room or something at the pineapple institute.

WN: This is in Makiki.

BY: Yes, in Makiki. And he said, "You take a cab and come to a side door." And he described it. "And you keep"—no, he didn't say anything about. . . . I'm not sure if I kept the cab or not.

But I went in this side door, knocked, and somebody let me in. And he [Kometani] came and introduced me to the board. And I sat at the table with them for quite a while. I think it was on maybe midnight or so. And they grilled me pretty much. In retrospect, I suppose that this board was largely Republican. It's an assumption, but I think that was the atmosphere. Anyway, they said, "Okay, you go on back to the hotel." Kome chaired the meeting. He was chairman of the board then.

WN: Were there other people present besides the board? Was there media, press, anything like that?

BY: No, it was a closed meeting, absolutely a closed meeting. A secret meeting I would term it.

WN: At midnight.

BY: At midnight. And he said, "You go on back to the hotel and don't talk to anybody."

So I went back. And then he called me in a while, and he said, "Burl, we have designated you as our new superintendent." Then he said, "Don't talk to anybody. You get your breakfast in the morning, and you get on the early plane and go back to Hilo."

And by, I guess, maybe the evening, or certainly by the next evening, the papers had said that I was designated as the new superintendent. But there's a little nuance that I want to tell you about, and I don't tell this very often. As I went out the door [after the interview], there was somebody standing in the shadows. And I went on down a little hill toward the cab, and I looked back, and it was Ralph Kiyosaki standing in those shadows. He's just standing there. And I don't know if maybe they had him come. I don't know. (I never even saw the door open or him go inside.) And he didn't speak to me. I went on past, (not really seeing) him, and I looked back and saw him. And I thought, what the heck. But I went on, back to the hotel. And I've never said that very much, but I read it this way. I think Ralph hungered to be the superintendent. And he's very status conscious and a very proud man. Before I got into the picture, he wanted them to court him, maybe. He had a lot of pride. And then (earlier) when I became involved, I told him that Kometani had been to see me. And I still said to him, "I wish you would come on and put your name in and let's go." I said, "We could do a lot together, if you were superintendent, you could help support this campus," and things like this. He wouldn't make that overt move.

WN: So you think he was there as an interviewee also, as an applicant, waiting his turn or something?

BY: I can only conclude that, yes. Otherwise, he wouldn't have known anything about it. Even though I stayed friends with him over the years, he never mentioned that to me, and I never mentioned it to him. But I think in retrospect that if he had come out, I would have been supportive and would have pulled back. I'm sure I would have. Because I was very, very happy here [at UH-Hilo] and I was enthusiastic about things here. And we were putting up a marvelous fight. We were having fun. I can remember how awestruck I (had been) to go up there and have them give me this big bunch of keys for that new library.

WN: Let me turn the tape over.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

WN: Were you---did you know of any other candidates at that time, besides Ralph Kiyosaki?

BY: I didn't know of other candidates.

WN: Was Walton Gordon a candidate for another go-around?

BY: I would be fairly confident in saying I think so. I think so. I'm not sure if it was right before this train of events or right after that he came over and wanted to make this sort of trade. I think it had to be after, I had been interviewed over there.

WN: Well, what went through your mind when Dr. Kometani called you and told you that you were the one selected? I mean, was there any doubt in your mind that you were going to take it? Or was . . .

BY: No, no, no doubt then. I could very easily have taken, "We've selected somebody else." But when I was, I was excited. And I carried the enthusiasm and the meshing of different kinds of people that we'd been doing on a small scale here as an idea of what we could do in the school system. And I'm not sure quite how I was apprised of this, whether it was at the interview—because the interview went on for, oh, maybe an hour or more. They told me that there were some serious personnel problems. And one of the major ones, of course, was Deal Crooker. And Deal Crooker was a thorn in—a bone of contention, I'll put it like that. Bill Coulter, the deputy whom I retained, told me that nobody could handle him.

WN: What was his [Crooker's] position?

BY: He was an assistant superintendent for curriculum.

WN: Under Walton Gordon.

BY: Under Walton Gordon. And he was (actually) running the show, (I think). He (seemed to have) all kinds of deals, he had deals on (things like) textbooks, (things like jobs). And whether this was true or not, I began to hear that he was really running the department, and Walton couldn't handle him, and the board couldn't handle him. And Kome said, "Now, one of your big problems is going to be to (handle) this guy."

And it was. It took me months to get him (out clearly). I began to see the patterns of behavior of this huge staff. He was indeed running things, and not just in curriculum, but in finance (and personnel). When I met the first time with the board as superintendent, they were just by way of appointing an assistant superintendent for finance. And Crooker's (or someone's) man was first. And I said to Dr. Kometani, "I would appreciate it if you'd let me look over and evaluate the list of candidates. And I need their vitae."

I don't mean to be racist about this, but there were no Orientals on the (top) list. They were people from the big corporations, money men from the big corporations and people like that. Way down, I saw Harry Tokushige's name. I read his vitae, and he was the man I wanted. He was the only CPA amongst them, for example. I wasn't going blindly, and I wasn't going for any particular reasons except he seemed, by far, the best man. And he turned out to be, of course. He turned out to be a sterling man and a guy who worked well with me, and was just a fine character in my book. But he was way down on the list, he was maybe tenth, (I don't remember). So I told the board that he was the one I wanted, and I gave the reasons, not any particular reason except that he was the best man, and he was a CPA and I had my eye on that. And these other guys were treasurers for Dillingham [Corp.] or etc., etc. But all I'm

saying that for is to say that Deal Crooker was running things, and he was an arrogant man and he did have deals going, and he had all kinds of (loyalties) here and there, and people who were fiercely loyal and controlled by him. So the whole curriculum thing was in limbo as far as I was concerned.

WN: Personnel wise, what was your—what authority did you have as superintendent to make personnel changes?

BY: I made 'em. I made 'em. And it was regularized, as a regular process, and it was open. And it was the best man or woman we wanted. "This is the way we're going to run it," (I said). As far as the board was concerned, they wanted the change as well. I'll say a word about [deputy state superintendent] Bill Coulter. Bill Coulter was just an old pro, you know. He wasn't a backbiter or anything like that, but he had survived and was tough in power struggles within the educational system. But he was square and honest. And he was loyal to the person in the position. He was loyal to me on that basis. We didn't have a strong personal rapport. He didn't with anybody. He was a professional administrator. And I learned that he knew the system, he knew the history of the personnel, and he knew the behavior. And he would tell me straight. He would never volunteer information, but when I asked the questions, he would flesh out the answers, fully. So I learned to trust him pretty much.

WN: So the board would make recommendations or give you a list of candidates. Could you have gone outside of that list?

BY: Yes, I could have. And I could have asked for a renewed process for the top fiscal officer [i.e., assistant superintendent for finance]. And it was badly needed, and there were all kinds of shenanigans and so on. But I wanted somebody from outside, and Harry was from outside. He was a tough little guy. In dozens and dozens of hearings, he sat right by me, and had the page right and would just point to things. And I was kind of like a front man, in that sense. I relied upon him fully. Probably the most trustworthy of all of my colleagues in that time. But he, you see, came in from outside, and he could see the intrigue and the backbiting and the machine within the machine and things like that.

WN: How was the Deal Crooker situation handled?

BY: We finally fired him, for cause. It was a very painful thing for everybody, because it wrenched and it threatened so many people. It threatened all of the district superintendents, from Kaua'i to here. It was a wrenching of the whole system, because he had an arrogance about him that intimidated people. He intimidated people whose style here (in Hawai'i) is not to take something on head on, you know. Many of the administrators didn't. And of course we had a lot of mediocrity in this system, too, that had come up to the top as yes men and as toadies, things like that. So all of that had to be sorted out. And so it took me some time to get the guy.

WN: Did you store up any animosities in your personnel changes?

BY: I'm sure so. I'm sure that this was so. There were people—I won't dwell on names now, but there was one curriculum man who had been sort of a curriculum expert for Deal Crooker on workshops and things like that. And I found him to be very sterile in educational theory,

educational enterprise. But he stayed on, but was always a grouser and always a doubter. And in an organization like that, you have that. Which comes to the fact that an educator must always see himself or herself as a teacher first.

WN: Well, let's get into this. You just took office, what were your visions and goals starting out? Then after that, we'll get into some of the practicalities.

BY: My goal was to bring the educational system alive. It almost seemed like they had their heads down, you know. And there was a remoteness and a sort of a digestive system, in which people did their duty out in the sticks, and then moved on and came up to Honolulu and so on. And there was not a feeling of totalness of the system, that we were all in it together.

One of the first things—it was sort of silly and said just almost on whim—I said that I was going to visit every school in the state. And I did. Every school in the state, over a period of the first year or so. And bringing a sort of a fullness to the system that I felt was needed. To try to keep teachers out in far places, and we hit upon ways of trying to do that. And trying to look upon it as a unified system, rather than as a disparate and fragmented system. Now, I'm just saying this as sort of what I felt instinctively.

And so I just went to work and began to emphasize the excitement of education and the commitment that we all needed in order to improve education. I began to make contact with other state superintendents and so on. I became part of the council of chief state school officers, an active member of that. They taught me a lot about coherence of a system. And I was still a member of that when I went to [U.S.] Trust Territory [of the Pacific Islands], you see. I was a member again, I should say, because I as the commissioner of education for trust territory was a member of the chief state school officers of the U.S.

So over a period of time, I began to see more largely. And I did it—in retrospect I'm saying to you that I did this issue by issue. Not to have a great comprehensive plan, that's very appealing to people, but that may not be the way to go about it. I think I mentioned to you the other time about building within teachers a willingness to continue to improve themselves. Just one night, Harry and I just sat and made a dual system of in-service training. Well, in-service training was an issue. And we went issue by issue, rather than having some grand plan that forced everything into conformity with everything else. Administration is a creative thing. Good administrators are creative. And they may have a master plan, but it's got to be large enough and seeing largely enough so that the issues can be addressed one by one, as is politically or economically feasible. So it's just a style of approach, rather than a marvelous and all-enlightened master plan.

WN: Well, in reading some newspaper articles from the time that you actually were named and were interviewed a few times about your philosophy of education, one of the things that you emphasized a lot was putting teachers on a pedestal.

BY: Yeah, yeah. The whole system rests upon the impetus and the enthusiasm of teachers who can set kids on fire or who love their teaching, they take pride in it. I feel so strongly that an educational system is no better than its teachers, and it rests upon these teachers. Up here, I worry about this.

I'm going to illustrate now. This young lady was—I was on her doctoral committee, in Washington State [University]. She took her doctorate at University of Idaho. I also worked in a collaborative effort with her at the University of Idaho. She came out here [Hawai'i] to teach. Quite well-prepared and all, but when she began to try to say, "Hey, these are my standards in my classes," she was told in no uncertain terms, "We don't want to lose students. And they can appeal a grade, and they can appeal your methodology," and so on. First thing you know, the ground was cut out from under her. I'm just saying that as an example of what I'm saying about the teachers. (Needless to say, she left after one very disappointing year. As a teacher she had enthusiasm and skills, but the prevailing atmosphere here made her leave.)

And I told you about the fact that I wanted a reorientation of administrators. "Every administrator has got to go back to school, myself included. Everybody's got to teach, make lesson plans and teach twice every year in a classroom."

WN: By administrator, you mean all the way up to the top.

BY: All the way up. All the way up. Everybody. No exceptions.

WN: Even those in finance.

BY: Even those in finance. They may not have the training for it, but they've got to orient themselves and reorient themselves that this is the real world. This is an educational system. And it stretches a person to remember that the classroom is where the thing really is.

So the regard for a teacher is a mystical one. I don't know if you—in my time, when I was going to lots of meetings and so on, there was a guy named Ralph Tyler, from the University of Chicago. He's an old, kind of a wizened old guy. He's a bright, bright man, impractical (maybe), but a bright theorist of American education. He said that teaching is a mission. You're on a mission to set fires of enthusiasm and eagerness to learn with the students. A lot of these students who aspire to be teachers somehow haven't been shaped up to have the right aspirations. They want the prestige, and they want the pay, and they want the accoutrements of this job. And learning and the student as the prime cause are not up front in their minds. Any system has to have that. And a university system has to have it very badly. When I described the enthusiasm up here [UH-Hilo], we had that enthusiasm and the kids were with us.

A girl stopped—a lady, she's an older lady now—stopped me in the grocery line, and she said, tears in her eyes, she said she still remembered how exciting it was and the things I had said to intrigue them into learning, and learning English and knowing it. She's taught English all these years, see. I'm not saying that to say that that's exceptional. I'm saying that's the issue. The issue is the teacher. And it's incredible, the amount of overburden of administrators that we have. Huge numbers, forgetting that what we want to do is give this teacher all the kind of help he or she can get. I've been advisory over here to Waiākea High School, and they're working on this return of the power to the local setting.

WN: The school/community-based management.

BY: School/community-based management. This is why we (originally) formed the school advisory councils, to try to break this open. And that's something that just came, it was a problem. How are we going to address this? And is it really [a good] idea to decentralize and to diminish this incredible and implacably awkward power at the state level?

WN: Now, were you aware of this top-level bureaucracy when you came in, or you . . .

BY: No, I . . .

WN: . . . just learned it as you got in.

BY: I discovered it as I got in. And it came (for example), in the form of a Deal Crooker, where they had absolute sway upon the choice of textbooks. "Hey, what a plum that is," you know, they'll say. And, "Hey, this guy can get you hired or fired in any job you want." And this wasn't a stated thing, but it's the way the system rolls along, and the first thing you know, everybody's looking upward to the fount. I used to make this speech. One time I had a fellowship to—what's that school in Southern California? Anyways, on creativity and so on, and I went. And everybody had a golden key to the solutions of the problems in American education. And it started with more money. There was one guy who made a presentation to our seminar. And this was an IDEA. . . . You know, there used to be capital I, capital D, capital E, capital A, IDEA, fellows. I was an IDEA fellow at—not Roger Mudd, but . . .

WN: Harvey Mudd [College].

BY: Harvey Mudd.

(Laughter)

BY: Okay, great. And it just seemed like everybody had some golden key that was going to take more money, and you had to get the personnel. There was one guy who made a presentation to us. Every morning at this big high school in suburban L.A., they rescheduled every student every day. Usually there wouldn't be any changes, but if you wanted to change this time or whatever, every day a kid would go to his homeroom and get a schedule for the day. And this was supposed to be the golden key. Somebody said, "Well, we need to be flexible, so flexible means daily scheduling of the students." And this kind of absurdity has been rampant in American education. Everybody has some sort of panacea for solving all the problems, and what it does is just catch us in a big blob of mediocrity.

WN: Now, regarding flexibility, how would that—at the time, in '62, on a spectrum of flexibility and inflexibility, where did this Hawai'i system fall?

BY: The Hawai'i system took great pride—and I've often said in speeches around the country, I'd say this is the largest single school system. Actually that was not so praiseworthy, but I thought it was at first. Then I began to see that it wasn't, and that the real excitement is done quietly in a period five or two in a given school, remote or otherwise. And that the teacher comes on fire and she's got those kids just on the edge of their seats in excitement over learning. And there's no magic way that this can be done, in this literature here. It happens when the person thinks he or she is on a mission. And it's exciting, and it's one of the

world's most important careers. And it's terribly demanding. "I'm not going to be the same as the teacher next door to me," (and so forth).

I began to discern all of that when I was visiting the schools in the state. I was at a school on Maui where there were two kindergarten classes side by side. And I went into this one first, and it was just jumping and alive. The windows were open and it was bright and the kids were just as responsive and that [teacher] was just having tremendous (attention and) excitement with these kids. And I went right next door, and the [teacher] had the blinds at half mast, and there was lots of coughing, the little kids had jackets on, it was (actually) cold. Now, this was next door, and right from one room to the next. Now, I could give lots of stories about that, but that (compelling instance) began to show me that the important thing was what was happening in (the one) classroom as opposed to what was happening in (the other). And I told the district superintendent, Mike O'Neill, old, old hand, and one of Deal Crooker's boys, (I think) was superintendent of schools for Maui. And I said, "You know, you've got to either get rid of this teacher or get her into some workshops, get her health better. She's coughing, the kids are all coughing. And look at this one." And it was a (dramatic) illustration of the difference that the teacher makes with the same resources.

Now, this is very difficult, and it's naive of me to think that there's some (set) way of doing this, but the way to emphasize the importance of the teacher and to give the resources and to give latitudes of different techniques and things like that. My wife went this morning to her Chapter I students. And they're doing just that. They're trying to inject that specialness into (the life of) every kid and every teaching situation.

WN: Now, looking at it from the perspective—here you are, superintendent. Now, you have this attitude about teachers, the importance of teachers and the thrill of learning and so forth. How, as superintendent, did you intend to foster this? What needs to be done administratively? I mean, it's one thing to go around and give talks about what you think an ideal educational situation is, but what about—I mean, is it money? Is it more money that should be going into salaries? What were steps that you were taking to achieve this ideal?

BY: (Let's illustrate.) One of the last speeches I made to all of the (school) administrators, at Farrington High School, in the auditorium there. And all of the state administrators—principals, and district people, and so on—were there. And what I'm trying to illustrate here is that a (set of) creative approaches is needed. And I made this speech, and I heard groans, and I got poison letters about (what I said). And this was (only) three months before I resigned [in 1966]. It was the last time I talked to all of the school administrators. I said that somehow the administration of the school (had gotten) out of the hands of the teachers, and they did not have confidence. I won't go into chapter and verse, but I had then and have had since, a very marked uneasiness about the caliber of the school administrators.

WN: This would be the principal.

BY: The principal, (largely). Let's just say we're focusing on principals. And I said, "One thing I am going to advocate to you this morning is that a principal of a school should be elected from the faculty and given, say, a three-year term. And he (or she should) serve the faculty as a faculty member who's put in this position because (of his or her) relationships among the teachers. And that person's going to be elected and is going to be (assured). There's going to

be a finance and capital person on the staff, but the principal is one of you, one of the teachers. And we want that principal to be in harmony with and represent the teachers." There were groans in this.

Years later, I got a letter from a principal up here, on this island, apologizing to me. He said, "I hated you." He said, "I realize now what you were trying to do. You were trying to break this closed-mindedness, this anti-intellectualism of the administrators, this pettiness of administrators." He said, "It's taken me all these years to get the courage to write you and apologize."

Well, the patterns of American education have to be broken is what I was really saying to them. Now, nobody counseled me to say this and to make this speech to these people, but it struck terror in their hearts. Their whole reason (and process) for being and so on was broken.

WN: How was a principal selected?

BY: Well, it was really very political in the politics of the system. The only way a guy could work his way into the system of accredited principals, we'll say, would be to start way out in Pāhala or someplace, and gradually work himself up to O'ahu, and then get into the city. And the system fostered that, and that was the way you looked at your job. "Hey," that person would say, "I taught at South Point," or, "I taught at Pāhala for three years now. I've earned something better than this." Instead of seeing this as a marvelous full place in its own right. So the teachers and the principals had this idea of gradually working one's way into Honolulu. It's still deeply embedded. It's not as much so now, because the islands are much more—I mean, different islands are more attractive.

But anyway, over here at Waiākea, I watched the drama of this. They've got a top-notch principal, Dan Sakai. And he's got his teachers right with him. Whether they're new teachers from the Mainland or where, he's got them. Now, his problem is—there's an irony in this—but his problem is that he may have too much. He's got tremendous potential with his staff and his new school. You know, it's one of the President's schools, designated—the President of the U.S. has named outstanding schools and so on, and Waiākea is one of them. One night I went there and I was there early for the meeting. The meeting was in the library. I went around and I looked at the accession on these incredible display of books. I'd say 40 percent of the books I picked off the shelf had not been borrowed, had no accession. Marvelous library, but not a vital part of the school (or the students' lives). Now, in some way, we have to think of methods of bringing all of this learning and this information, and make it exciting so that those books are borrowed.

Now, I don't understand—and I don't (need) to understand—the mechanism for bringing about more localization. It has to come from ideas of making the school so vital, so responsive to (students and) parents and so on. A (parent) was at this open meeting of the committee, and she got way off the subject about her daughter not being responded to and not being helped and not being made aware of all of the opportunities of being a student there. Now, the irony was that this mother—she's an older, kind of an emotional lady—a former student of mine. And she was such a vibrant student, and I can see that she was thinking that—I think she has two daughters at Waiākea High School. And nothing was happening, they were just lumps.

And the problem is, how do we (enthuse) the lumps, and how do we make this all exciting, and how do we make people read their library books, and how do we do all these things (to produce an educated populace. I must trust the teachers of my grandchildren.)

END OF SIDE TWO

TAPE NO. 21-30-2-91; SIDE ONE

WN: In talking to some principals for this project, interviewing them, one of the major frustrations of being a principal was not being able to hire your own teachers.

BY: Sure.

WN: Now, is that something that you advocated as superintendent?

BY: Yes, yes, I think that if a guy is told who his staff members are, why he just moves down a peg in the creativity. And that's why this guy over here—and I almost said his name then—he's in charge, you see. It's riding right on his shoulders, and he operates in this feeling of it. It's only going to be a localized school and responsive to his own clientele when this is true. I'd say that, as much as anybody I've met in the whole school system, he's in charge. And his teachers are responsive and reflect his leadership. I've just been to three or four of these meetings, and I ideate with him, but I'm not giving him any panaceas. Everybody thinks that somebody's going to roll in and have a magic key, you see, a golden key to make everything okay, so we can regain our prestige as a nation and all of that business. That's far beyond the issue. The issue is the excitement of learning in this community.

WN: Were salaries adequate, in your opinion, when you came on board?

BY: I think pretty much. I made this boast in speeches in Washington and other places, that the corps of teachers, in those days for this large single system, were probably the best corps of teachers in the country. And I said this, and I believed this. Not only with degrees, but with the ferment of methodology. I've mentioned the Hawai'i English Program, the HEP program. And this was ideating among teachers. It wasn't something where I went to the meeting and impressed my disciplined ideas upon them. At that time, two of the departments of the Mānoa campus—this wasn't in the College of Education, this was in [College of] Arts and Sciences—speech and English, advocated openly and with no apologies to wipe out pidgin. Well, who ever heard of anything as silly as that. But this was the university speaking. This was as much as they deigned to get into the intellectual growth of this society. Well, I don't want to get off on that, but I am saying that the teacher corps of this state, in those days, was pretty good.

WN: Is that a credit to the College of Education at the UH?

BY: They had tough requirements, they had some good teachers, teachers of teachers, and so on. And there was also a kind of a moderate, but not overwhelming, importation of teachers. So the mix was good. And during those years that the teacher corps was very strong, I boasted

about them, in Europe and in other places. Now I'm going to just skip to when I was over in Trust Territory, I came back one time and the teachers were on strike.

WN: Here.

BY: Here in the state [in 1971]. And Tom, who used to be the education reporter—can't think of his name.

WN: Tom Kaser.

BY: Tom Kaser. He came to the airport (as I left), and we were talking. And he said, "What do you think about the strike?"

I said, "I think it's a tragedy."

He said, "Well, how do you know?"

I said, "I saw it in the eyes of the teachers. I went out to the picket line and visited with the teachers, and I saw it in their eyes."

Well, that's pretty esoteric, that's pretty non-to-the-point, you see. But the fact is that there was something demeaned and demoralized about the teachers by that time. And they were being so organized and they were whooping it up about this or that, rather than focusing upon education and being proud and active (and creative) as teachers. So that picket line just hurt them terribly in their own self-image, and so forth. I'm not an expert, but I had the feeling that from school to school, and district to district, and in the system, there were so many good and vibrant teachers (at that time). In Waiākea, over here, that's a pretty darn good faculty. It still has somewhat that same mix. And they're opinionated, and they're enthusiastic. I saw the professionalism at Waiākea High School. Some of those people are pretty shiny people. And they're pros. Now, I'm not saying everything is sweetness and light over there. There are some problems. But they're working them out among themselves, and they're trying to serve a mission for their clientele. That's what a school has to have.

WN: So you saw your mission as superintendent to be sort of the facilitator of all these separate entities called schools, in essence, little governments, rather than you being the head of—looking down at all of these people.

BY: Yes, I'm sure that there were people, even on the board, who thought I would come in with a lot of golden keys, and that I would fix everything up, and I would just make it an ideal state.

WN: Now, is that what they wanted too, though? Did they want the equivalent of school/community-based management today? Is that what they wanted?

BY: No, no. They didn't have that. You see, a lot of times it isn't that they're for or against, it's that they don't have the vision for it. Anybody can have the vision if they train themselves to look out broadly and to see largely. And I could've gone into that job and developed my defenses and prolonged and have a benign dictatorship, let's say. Who's in charge here, you know? That's the way I had to be in the marine corps. But I saw that that really didn't draw

people out and make people rise to themselves, (to their individual potential).

WN: Did the school board members come to you with specific ideas as how the schools should be run, or was it more of a laissez-faire type of situation?

BY: They looked to us for ideating. When Harry Tokushige and I made that dual track of in-service training, they were just enthralled. Because we presented it well and it was sound. And it took the heat out of these bitter arguments about this system forcing us to be in-service, all these things. This is an example of creativity in administration. Gets a job done, and it keeps everybody at ease about it, and you have choices, you're not cornered, and you're regarded as a professional.

WN: What about reducing class size? I know that was one of your major platforms, and I think you were fairly successful in that, weren't you?

BY: Yes. I think it still—oh, when I hear some of the class sizes here, it just breaks my heart. And it just simply makes it impossible for even the most creative teacher to face herself (or himself) every day. It's a terrible burden to have an oversized class. It's a psychological problem that just eats at you all the time. And you begin to compromise, you've got to. You've got a vision, okay, but you can't bring it into play because it just beats you physically and mentally. So it's a serious problem. It's a really serious problem. I have visited a lot of schools in other countries. You can't do anything you want to do if you don't aspire to and stand for an open educational system. You can be selective and you can make people beg for the eighteen or twenty places in my room, and when those are gone, that's it. (Teachers are right, class size is terribly important.)

Now, inevitably people bring up the large classes in Japan. There are some really large classes and large schools, and I visited those. I was teaching there one summer, and so I visited quite a few schools. I remember talking with a group of young high school students in an English class. Just broke my heart. They were so enthusiastic, and you just felt like you could just do all kinds of things with those students, but there were forty or fifty of them in a classroom. And they were just before taking those national exams. And you talk about the warmth and the vibrancy of students, they were tremendous. A lot of them, you knew, didn't have a chance. Well, that's a different style. It's a different style. And they can do a lot by rote and by the fear of being rejected, and those kids worked lots harder than they will as they go on to the university. [Once] they go on to the university in Japan, they just kind of loll around. But if I had forty of those kids, we could whip the world. They were so hungry and so alert and so responsive. But too many of them in a classroom. Can't follow and get them to be involved in their own ideating. What they're doing is regurgitating and they're doing a form fit, and when they can't make it on that test, why, it's too bad. (That's the high point of the suicide curve in Japan.)

WN: Did you have any kind of timetable? Did you have any idea of how long you were going to be in office?

BY: What I've really been telling you is that I do a lot by sensing, being open to people (and their problems), and (listening). I thought maybe four years or so would be okay. But the different aspects came more pointedly than that. And the intrigue was fierce, the incidence of personal

attacks and so on was building. And it's just a way that people do if they're not turned on and if they're not in agreement. I couldn't have won an election to be voted back in by the principals, you see.

WN: Because of that speech you made.

BY: Yeah, yeah. You know, I mean, that's goofy. And it was a reflection upon them and how they worked hard to get where they were and all of that.

WN: I see. What about things like, you know, you said that every administrator needs to go back to the classroom. Did that ever come close to being a reality?

BY: Oh, we did it. We did it for maybe a year.

WN: What about---weren't there some of those that came from the outside. You know, for example, Harry Tokushige was not in the Department of Education . . .

BY: But we found something for him to do.

WN: Oh?

BY: We found a business class or something like that, (as I remember).

WN: Is that right?

BY: Oh, yeah.

WN: Now, how did that go? How was that accepted by the whole administrative staff?

BY: Well, it wasn't done year after year, and if it had been, it would have begun to change attitudes. It changed some attitudes, nevertheless. But it refocused the process of education and what the teachers went through. All I had to say to the staff then was—you see, the teacher has to do that every day. The teacher has to go through that agony and be organized and achieve every day. And it just reorients them, the administrators, so that they realize this incredible load that a teacher carries.

WN: Was there resistance?

BY: Well, there was indignation. But everybody, there was just no question that we all had to do it. And when I did it, I went to Roosevelt or (somewhere like that, and maybe McKinley). I've forgotten now.

WN: What'd you teach?

BY: I taught a course in English. I think it was in Roosevelt, McKinley or Roosevelt. And not with big fanfare, but for a reorientation of me and the classroom. Then when you think you can extrapolate and you can think, well, this is in thousands of classrooms every day, this is what goes on. My uncertainties, and my lack of preparation, all of these things come into

play.

WN: Was the civil service system here a hindrance to what you wanted to get done? In the sense that, you know, so-called ineffective administrators would be there no matter what.

BY: There were a lot of politics in that, but I tried to end those. A lot of the district superintendents, and especially district officers on O'ahu, were guys who had behaved themselves in the system over the years. I don't want to name any names, but you would recognize some of the names of those old hands who came up through the ranks and did their party work and stayed loyal to whatever the intrigue was. This is an illustration. There was an opening for district superintendent. And I put a young guy in there, young tiger, beautiful mind and creative guy. I have followed him and his career since. He has, all his life, been a creative and marvelous educator. Never lost his enthrallment about education in the system. He's retired, [but] he is still doing creative things in education. I won't go into it. I don't want to single the guy out. But my point is that this didn't go down well with the elite. This young guy went from school to school, he knew his schools, he knew the problems, he was supporting the principal, and supporting the teachers, all through there. Very creative. And he caught the vision that we had. He caught the vision. He had this vision of how great we could do. He gradually bit the dust and went into the Department of Education on a small scale. But he did a fine job and he was an honorable man. And tried to keep that spirit up.

WN: So you're saying that the person that you selected was someone that really wasn't necessarily the next in line, or something like that, so that caused some animosity.

BY: And any administrator must have that latitude. A lot of this is what your attitude about human nature is. If you see a young comer here and nurture him or her, and as long as you're in power, you take care that that person continues to grow and contribute. And this is a way vital industrial systems are made. This is the way vital school systems are made.

(Telephone rings, Taping stops, then resumes.)

BY: It may seem surprising, but it seems to me that in a school system, the people who help it flower out must have a deep and abiding faith in humankind. Avoiding the entrapments, such as cliques, power nexus, and things like that. And maybe keep a certain management mobility. That is, not to develop an inside clique, not to develop people deliberately who are loyal to you. Keep it open and consider oneself expendable. I'm expendable. And that doesn't fit with the human ego, you know. If I have an overweening ego, I may hang in at all costs and thrash around and do lots of damage. So I must have loyalties that are based upon the principles of development and enhancement of teaching. And if that is a main plank in my philosophy, I must be creative in seeing that that is promulgated, that it is extended and protected, rather than having (interruption). The (interruptions) within the school system here are the—this is the problem.

WN: With that thought, why don't we take a break. And we'll continue this afternoon, and we'll pick up on that intervention idea.

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape No. 21-31-3-91

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

R. Burl Yarberry (BY)

September 19, 1991

Hilo, Hawai'i

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: This is an interview with Dr. Burl Yarberry, on September 19, 1991, at his home in Hilo, Hawai'i. The interviewer is Warren Nishimoto.

Okay, we left off the last time talking about—and you used the word—I think it was [intervention]. Was there excessive noneducational interference while you were in office?

BY: It was bad then. And I think it still is bad, or worse. That's my observation. The seats of power are wrong. And every time there's a spectacular improvement in education, it's when the people actually involved—the educators and the students—come to a vividness of exchange that is their own. I have argued for universal free education all over the world. As I've watched here and reflected here, I wonder if a free and open educational system is possible. I've argued for it for so many years, and I've argued with people from other countries, most heatedly in Germany, for example. I had terrible arguments with the people in the universities and in the ministries of education and culture in the German states for a free and open education system.

WN: By free you mean . . .

BY: Freely in access.

WN: Free in access.

BY: Yes.

WN: Open meaning . . .

BY: Open meaning that it's available. And I get to pit myself against the system to become a success. And I have as much right to go to school as you do. No matter if you're the son of a doctor, and I'm a son of a brew master or whatever. We have the same right and the same access to that open system.

WN: Can I ask you to sort of set the scenario here as to ideally the way the system was devised, how should it have been working? Let's look at you as superintendent, let's look at the

legislature, the governor, the school board, and the school-level administrators, and so forth. How did you envision that to be operating? Now, this is idealistically, now, you know, upon taking office.

BY: Well, upon taking office, I very soon began to realize that it was not a system that the educators were running. There's a bridge being built down here that has taken longer than the Golden Gate Bridge. The bridge over the Wailoa River down here that was destroyed by the tidal wave in 1961—or it was damaged—and they've been working on it for many years, and it's still not finished. You probably drove by it, if you went . . .

WN: The one by Suisan [Co. Fish Auction Market]?

BY: Yeah. And this was so politicized that it's taken this long. This (local) engineer, who lives here and whom I have known since the tidal wave, (was hired) to try to straighten it out. And he's having to say to the contractors, "You guys keep your hands off of this." Because they want to run it on and on and on in a financial way. They don't (seem to) care about finishing the bridge. (Maybe this is changing now, but it's in a cost-plus mode.)

So many people are hovering around education to make educational decisions in the same way. And it goes on and on and on, and the problems are not really addressed. As well-meaning as the legislature is, it is not the arena in which to make educational decisions. It simply is not. The governor's office and the lieutenant governor's office, these are not the places to be chairmen of the board of education. And that's what we see time after time in a different guise, or with a shift in power this way or that way. Boards of education, as enlightened citizens [should be able] to perceive patterns that educators have designed to bring about excitement and to bring about integrity in a school system. But for years the educational system has not run that way. There are communities where it does, not a lot of them. It's almost like an intoxicated person veering down the street, this way and that way—based upon patterns of the homeless or patterns of this or that. So educational matters recede into the background. And it's still up to a creative teacher to cause educational excitement, and that's against the whole atmosphere of the school, chances are.

WN: Now, you were superintendent at the time of, still, appointed boards. Now, these appointed boards were appointed by the governor. Right?

BY: Yes. Appointed—I could defend either way the origin of the board. But the role of the board is what I'm talking about, you see.

WN: Which was what? What was the role of the board?

BY: The role of the board was to oversee and enable and to protect the integrity of the educational system (and the educators). That's what the board's role was. The board could make this superintendent answerable, and he had to be answerable. When educational matters were discussed, that was fine. But seldom was the docket clean. And seldom was there an opportunity to inject new ideas. The new ideas had to be laundered and they had to be regularized. Testing systems (are like that). There are other ways to learn whether the students are learning to read and write than standardized tests. I'm not just saying standardized tests. They are okay now and then. But to tailor the system by that is taking the

decision for educational excellence out of where it belongs. If we have the courage, as a society, to let the schools of Hawai'i be their own (full) selves, rather than adhering to the national testing system, then you're going to find all kinds of enriching and interchange in the academic, intellectual sense. (Excellence comes from this encouragement. It calls for a different mind-set.)

WN: Now, the role of the legislature was more purse strings, would you say?

BY: But, it's always had programs as well. They've always had an advocacy, either in hearings or whatever, on the content, and the methodology, and different things like that.

WN: Which is what you disagree with.

BY: I disagree with that, yes. (They chronically act like the real board, or worse, they try to regulate.)

WN: So ideally, it was more having the purse strings, and you as superintendent going there and saying, "This is what we're going to do, this, this, and this. Can we have the money for it?" Is that it pretty much, in a nutshell?

BY: Yes, yes. And you see, the educator has to have that courage. He's got to say, "These are the reasons I've developed this strategy. We think we're weak in this. We don't think our kids are reading well enough." And why do we know that? Well, the access to the library, (for example). Here's one of the best school libraries I've ever seen up here, and I'd say maybe 40 percent of the books that I thumbed through—and I went clear around this big library, opening books, and a lot of them had not been taken out at all. Perfect mint condition, and this (may have been) three years after they were put on the shelf. If you're my principal, and I'm a teacher and a conscientious one, I am going to really exchange with you so that we can do our best (to develop readers). But my fifth-grade class may be a little different. It will have the skills, but it may just be markedly different from the one next door (in interests). And we've got to have the courage to say that that's okay.

There are general skills and areas of learning that need to be for all students. But my teaching of the Civil War, or my teaching last year of U.S. history up at Henry O[pukahaia] School, was like nobody ever heard before. And that's okay. Those kids really felt the Civil War, because they knew my grandfather was a drummer boy in the Civil War. They knew that my great-uncles, one had his leg shot off, and it divided their family. I talked about the tragedy of living on the border between the North and the South, and my family was shattered—my grandfather's family. The older boys joined the Southern army, and the Northern got the two youngest boys. And it shattered the family. Now, you bring that kind of thing into—not because it's on the docket in program, it's because it's real and it's vivid. And the kids—we looked at that whole Civil War movie [*The Civil War* on PBS], and boy, they really came alive on that. (They felt it personally, even though we took more time.)

WN: Now, whose responsibility is it to make sure a teacher gets the flexibility that they need?

BY: I think that the teacher's major defender should be the principal. And he (or she) should be able to fight clear to the presidency of the United States for the (flexibility).

WN: And who is the principal's supporter?

BY: The board (and the superintendent).

WN: The board and the superintendent.

BY: The board and the superintendent. And they must have the same confidence, the same mutuality, the same dedication, the same spirit of learning, all the way through this (organization). And the system has got to have the integrity so that this can happen. And somebody says, "Hey, you know those schools on the Big Island are really exciting, and they're so different. On the Kona side, they're this and that," and so on. "And on the other side they're something else." We've got to have the courage [to recognize] that that's how rich our country is in people. So that standardized school programs need to be not a fixed battle line, but it needs to ebb and flow, partly depending upon my teachers, partly depending upon the social events of the time, and that sort of thing. And pretty soon you have emerging people who know who they are and taking some pride in it. This is a very rich community here, you see, very rich community, in people.

My youngest daughter just came back from the Peace Corps in Africa, and she's really up on music, native musics and so on. We went to see her a year ago in Africa, and she was the only white person in this whole big tribal dance who got out there, and the people cheered, and the people were so excited that my daughter knew the dances and knew the rhythms and so on. So it's not something you might want to teach, necessarily, but you've got that richness to see people more largely. So that's what I'm really talking about. And you've got to have confidence. You don't say that this principal has got to be a startling leader in five years. You don't set (deadlines). You don't fix things and make barriers and obstacles to overcome. So an educator must be a real (intellectual) adventurer to be a part of this. And this is why it's so complex to have an open educational system. It's a very daring thing to have thought of. Here the people who founded this country and this state said, "We need an open education system. And we need it to reflect our values and our people and to interface with the world at large." And that's what the educational system has got to be. It's very exciting for me to watch the ebb and flow of people on this island. When I first came, there were very few Filipinos, and most of those were just little old bachelor men who lived in little (houses) out in the plantations. And then pretty soon, this young tiger became a lawyer, and pretty soon you've got a whole (body) of people. And they've all got a different style, different style of thinking, you know. And this conforms to being a citizen, but it's a richness that this place has.

Another way to put this might be that we tend to generalize that all students need Hawaiian history. Well, you can bring that alive and each island can have its own way of looking at who I am and what my society is. Years ago, when I was up here at the campus, on statehood we had a huge pageant in the civic center here. Another guy, (Duane Black), and I wrote the pageant. And it was bringing the major influxes of peoples into this. And it was a huge thing. We had guys with walkie-talkies directing different flows of different people at different times. It was not a polished thing, but it was a meaningful thing for this place. And it set--- there are still people who remember that as showing them who they (are and) were.

WN: So the state bureaucracy, then, didn't take into account the diversity about this place.

BY: Right, right. They absolutely haven't. (Growth has) been on other grounds. But what was so lovely about the HEP program that I mentioned, is that it was "classy" in any language. It was classy in this variegated state, in this brightly variegated state. And so it appealed to countries in Africa and in Indonesia and other places, as a way of looking at language learning and the role of language in the person's mind (in his society).

I helped negotiate contracts with—in Indonesia—with people studying the different languages. There are 213 different languages in Indonesia. And each of those tribal groups, except, perhaps, some of the very, very smallest, have come out with efforts to standardize their own language, so that their own contribution becomes more real and more respected, even among them. Even as tight as the society in Indonesia has been, and the volatility of its political milieu has been, they have not rejected this kind of approach to their national languages. So here, it's with due respect to all of the people who took a crack at it, the decisions—either the educators abdicated or the politicians overstepped their roles.

WN: Now, Governor Burns took over in '62, shortly after you came on board. Did that affect how things were run, a change in administration?

BY: Well, you see, as you rightly point out, it was soon after, not too long. In a practical sense, it was almost right away. And my secretary said, "Governor Burns wants to see you down at the . . ." What was that one hotel?

WN: Young?

BY: At the Alexander Young Hotel, and he had a suite there. His pre-office suite. ". . . and would like to talk to you."

So I went down to talk to him. We talked about ideas. And he was open about that. And so I stayed on [as superintendent]. He could have blown the whistle on me at that moment. The board would have had to knuckle under. It could have been very uncomfortable. Instead it was a very positive thing. I talked to him like I'm talking to you, about ideas and not about constraints and limitations. So, at that point, he made an effort to keep the legislature off my back. That first legislative session, I appeared in seventy-some testimonies regarding educational matters. Prepared statements and presentations to committees of the legislature. Now, that's absurd. That's simply absurd.

WN: And what was the reason for that?

BY: Well, each of those legislators had a vested interest in something or other. And so it was a matter of my talking seventy-six times, I think, on educational matters to people who shouldn't have had—well, I'll put it this way, who could have had a valid interest, but that was not the arena in which to sell that. And the governor told me, "Okay, I like your ideas. Let's go with it."

And for a while, it was okay. And I think I've told you that I visited with him at least once a week, sat with him at breakfast after he came home from Mass. Sometimes more than that. And we went over that, and he believed (me about the issues). But then, his agenda changed. He was a very modest man, and he was really a man of the people. But the machine began to

sway. And people pressured me to join the Democratic party and—oh, I won't go into that, except to say that there was overt action. And there was overt action for kickbacks upon Jack's reelection, and things like that, that I refused to do. Many things I tried to refuse to do, but pretty soon you take on the aura of being a dog in the manger. And you can fight, but the politicians had another agenda. Even in the latter times, when I was at a cabinet meeting, they went around the table to see who was going to give how much for [Burns'] reelection fund. Went clear around the table, guys saying, "Well, I'll give this much. I'll give this much." And there were, how many, seventeen people on the cabinet?

Comes around to me, here, and [University of Hawai'i] president Tom Hamilton, here. Asked me how much I was going to give, I said, "Fellows, this smells like kickback where I come from, and I can't give anything."

Fury, fury. Went to Tom, and Tom said, "I have to stick with Burl."

Well, those are death knells, you know.

WN: Well, fury meaning personally from Burns or from other people?

BY: Jack wasn't there. Jack wasn't there. Nine o'clock, he calls me in the office. He didn't call me Burl, he called me Chief. He said, "Chief, that meeting never happened this morning. Do you understand what I'm saying?"

I said, "Yes, sir."

But yet it did happen. And Bob Oshiro was (probably) almost literally furious. At times in the evening, at my house, a car would come to take me to a Democratic caucus. And I never went, you see. Well, this builds up. And pretty soon this Yarberry is a malcontent. Then it even gets lots dirtier than that, you see.

WN: Did you do any politicking from your Republican side?

BY: I never did. In those years, I think I went to the Republican convention every year, or every two years, whenever they had it. But to listen and to sometimes talk to people about educational needs, but nothing other than that. And in that kind of structure, I would have gone to the Democratic convention, also. But they—Bob Oshiro is a tough guy. He's a tough guy. And he was single-minded and very adept at politics. But you see, that's not what education needed. And it's not the arena, it's not the atmosphere in which educational matters are discussed and aspired to.

WN: Was there any kind—upon taking office, did Burns or anybody expect loyalty, politically? I mean, was that your first exposure to partisan politics?

BY: Yeah, it was my first exposure to (the realities). If Bill Quinn had been reelected, I would have tried to treat him the same way. I don't think I would have had the warm, personal relation that I did with Jack Burns, because I didn't—I think I told you about the Peace Corps thing. And it just wasn't a personal relationship. He [Quinn] represented something of arrogance to me, I must say, and an arrogant system of people. You've asked me, at least

once, why I was a Republican in this milieu. Because I like free choice, and I don't like adhering to this or that. It wasn't that I thought being a Democrat would be immoral or anything like that. It was that I had a general political philosophy that fit the Republican general philosophy. And I loved my grandfather and that was it. I would not ever want to be identified as a strict party man. I've seen some of the Republicans here who have now become sort of ashamed of their Republicanism, you know, over the years. And some businessmen whom I like very much, personally, who've had to tailor their Republicanism to Democratism.

WN: Did the makeup of the board, the makeup and the role of the board, change after Burns took office?

BY: Yes, it did some. These are the years in which Meyer Ueoka came on board, and people like that. Let's see, I'm a little hazy now. But I'll think tonight, when I'm reflecting on what I've said. (Oh yes, Ed Honda, Anna Kahanamoku, and people like that.)

WN: Well, there were people like Reverend [Robert] Loveless, who was probably from the earlier . . .

BY: Yes, and he was (relatively) an open thinker. He was somebody who reasoned carefully on the issues, probably as well as almost anybody on the board. And you could argue intellectually with him and be pretty sure that that's what you were really arguing about, not something else behind it. Ed Honda was very strong on the board in those days. And he was one of Bob Oshiro's really (loyal) guys, you know, and would've tripped me up from time to time if he could, I think, but couldn't (generally). And they were all puzzled that, up until the very last the governor was very cordial and open with me, as far as I'm concerned. I know that it wasn't as simple as that. But I had to operate as though it were. No political duplicity. I was going over some things about when—the newspaper stories about whether I would be a candidate for governor. It wasn't anything like that, you see. So I suppose one could say that I didn't really play the politics well enough to make it.

WN: Well, let's talk about the events leading up to your resignation. This was in 1966, and according to newspaper accounts, you submitted your resignation . . .

BY: Here in Hilo.

WN: . . . here in Hilo, right. But then there were some allegations that it was because of a discussion that you had with John Burns prior to that. Is that true?

BY: Yes, yes. I think he came to the point of thinking—with his body of followers and with his agenda—that I was a liability. I think that's so. And there were all kinds of innuendo. And when you've got a political machine, you can feed that in whichever way you want to.

The (incidental) mechanism of that was that there was an opening for a custodian in Kona. And the governor's people tagged somebody as getting the job. And I felt that was a test issue, and I refused. I just wouldn't budge on it. I wouldn't allow that sort of intrusiveness in the regularized process of filling a (DOE) position. But of course it was much more than that, it was a test to whip the lines back into place, (and, pressure on me, I'm sure. At that time,

not in the 1962 meeting, that the governor told me late one afternoon in his office that I should resign.)

WN: One news account [*Honolulu Advertiser*, April 12, 1966] following your resignation had Burl Yarberry saying that, "The governor wanted me out," and then it was the governor saying, "No," that "such a discussion didn't take place. We did have a discussion back in '62, when Mr. Yarberry came into my office and said, 'If I'm not doing the job, if I'm not cutting the mustard, let me know.' " Did that take place?

BY: That's what happened in the hotel, before he took office. He said he liked what I was doing and my ideas on education. And I said, "You let me know when you don't think that's true." And so that is (what happened then, before Jack became governor).

But (years later), [regarding] this Kona [incident], he said, "You can't do that."

And I said, "I have done it and we're sticking with the due process." I was and have always been a due process person. (And) I (could see) that it wasn't going to get better. (It was like they, the governor's people, were closing in.)

The governor wasn't threatening or anything like that, but he said, "This is the way it's going to be." (And he said to me in his office shortly before I resigned, "You should resign.")

And I can't tell you to this day if that guy got his job, but I think he did.

WN: Which guy, your guy or Burns' guy?

BY: Burns' guy. And you see this is so small, it's insignificant, as an issue. But it was a (sort of) test of my adhering to the system—to their system, to their machine—or not. So I thought this over, and I asked my wife to come with me to this meeting, and I resigned, here (in Hilo), at this meeting. (Somehow, I thought of that as being more fitting.)

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

WN: There's some reports saying that Lowell Jackson had already been asked by Governor Burns to serve. Is that true?

BY: Yes, (I think) it is true. This was shabby of (the governor. He was using Lowell Jackson as a sort of stalking-horse. And I've been told he was.)

WN: Did you know that [at the time or resignation]?

BY: No, I didn't know that.

WN: You didn't know it.

BY: I didn't know that. (In retrospect, Lowell Jackson's duplicity became clearer. I've crossed trails with him on the Mainland—University of Idaho—and I'd say that he's a man with a guilt problem.)

WN: So when . . .

BY: But you see, this (seems to have) been going on quite a long time, (months maybe). Oh, maybe once a week I'd have lunch with Lowell Jackson, and we'd talk educational affairs. And he (came on as a) kind of star of the education faculty at the university. But what he was doing was setting me up, ideating and trying to find out whether I was really loyal and that kind of thing. (As I think back, he may have been the one who told me about the Kona problem.) The system is what I was really loyal to. But it was a setup, yes. I suppose that it was unexpected for me to resign like I did. Because I hadn't cleared that with anybody, except my wife, and she knew that I was going to. Then I told the chairman of the board that I had a statement to read. And so I did not know at that point that Lowell Jackson would be appointed that smoothly. But it all fell in place, then you see, for me. I've been naive about lots of things. And I like to keep it that way. Because if I'm threatened, and I'm looking around behind me and all of that business, I would never exist. When I resigned, I did a lot of damage to myself in a number of ways, with regard to state retirement and lots of things like that. But that didn't come as an issue with me. The issue was that I sensed—and from all that I've said, you must surely realize that I do things by sensing the timing in many crucial things. And I sensed that this was the time to resign, and not be mauled. Because if Jack turned the dogs loose on me, it would have been a very bad thing. And it would've been demeaning, even worse than it was.

WN: Had you not resigned, would you have been fired?

BY: Eventually, (probably). Ed Honda was just bristling with importance. He was the chairman of the board by that time. And he was playing (really close) with Bob Oshiro. I'm not even suggesting that Jack Burns didn't know about it, but stayed sort of aloof from it. So I made the judgment to resign (after I talked to him). I'm just telling you sprinklings of what I knew or sensed.

WN: I think I remember that in the newspaper accounts you resigned, and then it was only a couple months later, when there was a flack between Lowell Jackson and the school board, when your statement came out, and this is when things about Burns and so forth came out. What was the reason for that? I mean, did you feel that you wanted to just keep everything quiet and let everything just take its course, or did something—what triggered you?

BY: I didn't come out of anything. That was behind me, and I don't know what you're referring to, really.

WN: Well, I think—let me just bring a little article out. This is dated April 12, '66 [*Honolulu Advertiser*]. And well, it says, "Yarberry Charges Burns Takeover." This is in April, and I think you resigned in February.

BY: Right.

WN: So I'm just—I was just wondering, curiously, you know, you coming out two months later.

(Pause in taping while BY reads article.)

BY: Well, I'm not sure what precipitated this exactly, but as I try to put this in framework, let me just put it like this. Somebody came to me and—well, maybe reporters, I'm not sure—said, "Well, what are you going to do?"

Well, [James] Bushong came and offered to [hire] me at Kam[ehameha] School. The University [of Hawai'i] and the College of Education had some job. But you see, I was a kind of a pariah. And it would've been very grudging, I sensed, for me to go to the university. I wasn't of the in group at the university, and knew this, and knew that I would be an embarrassment to them and so on. I felt that I could go to Kam School and do some good and help coordinate the system between the boys' and the girls' school. So I was principal of the boys' school and coordinator of [secondary] education. So I felt like that was more worthwhile.

Now, there's something that happened after I'd been there a year or so. I was the one designated to go to the [Kamehameha Schools/Bishop Estate] board of trustees for major funds requests. Bushong was clever enough—he was a very clever man—to use me because he knew that I knew Dick Lyman and some of the trustees. And so pay raises and things like that, I would go to the board to get, and got. But anyway, I take this as a sort of subtle admission by Jack Burns that I had a valid position. Because—I wasn't there over (two) years or so, at Kam School, and Bill Norwood came. Bill Norwood had been [Burns'] executive officer. And Bill was now high commissioner of Trust Territory. He came to me and said, "Burl, you've always said that you like tough jobs, I've got one for you."

And this was [the position of] commissioner of education for Trust Territory. He came and asked me if I wanted that. Now, what I'm saying is that Jack Burns could've killed that very quickly. He had close rapport with Bill Norwood. And that offer would not have come forward, if Jack hadn't been privy to it. So I take that to have been not a sop, but as a gesture of respect. (Both of these administrative positions, Kamehameha Schools and TTPI, would not have been tendered to me unless Jack Burns put in his OK. He may even have suggested them. I personally think he did.)

WN: I'm going to ask you now to assess your performance as superintendent. In some of the newspaper articles and quotes by legislators and so forth, it was, "Burl Yarberry was a good man, a good educator. He was an idealist, he had a vision, but he wasn't a good administrator." Do you agree with that?

BY: (It depends upon whether the job question is leadership or administration. They are not the same thing. People generally think so. I don't.) Our whole conversation has borne that out. If administrator is what you expect, what helps you to survive. I had trouble with (some) staff, because they were incompetent. Everybody doesn't have the same idea of what a good administrator is. A good administrator is a guy who turns the pages right and is organized right. I'm sure that it's evident to you that I am not organized as a conventional person, you know. But I have an agenda and I sense and I see, and project into the future and see more largely. And so, that may not be an administrator. (Whether or not it's leadership is the question.) But I had at least one top-notch administrator working with me, and that was

Tokushige. He was organized, and he was a good administrator. And I didn't need to be a fiscal administrator. But I needed to be able to trust him and to work with him and sit with him and have him make sure that I understood implications of this or that fiscal decision. So that's good administration to me. So I don't agree with that, I would say. But I'm not a conventional administrator. (In that role of superintendent, I looked to be inspiring, creative, and analytical, as the proper role.)

WN: Did it anger you for those things to come out in the press?

BY: Well, I wished sometimes that I could make my point of it, as I'm being allowed to do now. That did hurt, yes. (Even in) Micronesia it was a very hard thing. I went into a mess (there too), cleaned it up. I worked with the congress of Micronesia, [and it] became viable. Then (in the later years) corruption set in, the corruption of a new administration, (not Bill Norwood's). And corruption tags (all of the involved) people as bad administrators. Not only do educators not see how the style should be, but the general public perceives that this is not their idea of an administrator. I don't think the top person in an organization needs to be an administrator, not in the context in which we attribute this or that skill to a person. I think that the top person should be a person who can reach out and dream bigger dreams and that kind of thing. And this is not reassuring to the nickel-and-dime people (of the organization).

WN: Were you too much of a visionary, dreamer? Were you too intellectual? Were you not pragmatic enough for this job?

BY: Let me just say this to you. When I went into office, it came out that I was also a poet. And they had some of my poems in a Sunday section of the [*Honolulu*] *Advertiser*. And one woman wrote in that she was very much alarmed that such a sick mind was the head of our school system. Somebody else wrote in and said, "How wonderful that we have a real thinker who writes poetry like that."

Well, I'm saying that in the matter of (top) administration. Frankly, I don't see very much, not nearly enough, dreamer(-motivator) category in that job. We're not niggling and playing politics here, we're talking about an educational system. We're talking about an open system. We're talking about a system in which kids can (be inspired), and teachers can (inspire) and see more largely. And that's not easy. The public has to be on board in some degree, and the teachers and the other people do too.

WN: Now, it's said that the superintendent needs to be an educator, needs to be an administrator, and needs to be a politician. Do you agree with that? Is that what's in store for our future, in terms of future superintendents or leaders of our education? Someone who can do all of that, or do you think the system needs to be changed so that we get, number one, an educator?

BY: I don't think it's realistic to expect that of the superintendent. I think it's kind of a hard-nosed naïvete, to put it one way. And our whole society is oriented in that way. And I think that the structure could be made to play that one's deputy—I could just stand back now and say Bill Coulter should have protected my flanks more, and he should've been more practical, but he kept his head down and his tail in that office, you see. And I was out in front. He was my deputy. I don't say that—but somebody could say he should've been doing all these things to make sure Burl was organized. I don't believe that. I believe he did pretty well. He was shy.

And he was guarding his flanks, yes. He wasn't a bold man. But he was a good deputy. But the office of the superintendent should be structured so that these requirements are met. But think of this. Think how unreasonable it is for legislators to impose this load, seventy-six times or whatever. My wife said seventy-six times. Two o'clock in the morning, Stanley Hara calls me up, I go to the legislature. Is that what we mean by being well organized? (Is the superintendency where the fault lies?)

So, I don't know. I think if I drew a bill of particulars about an ideal superintendent, it would be that he or she would be an intellectual, and a visionary. And we fill in with that. Those are the things that are hard to come by, and they don't come down the road very often. People are too cramped and warped by that time to have the courage and the vision to play with ideas and to have the ability to sell those ideas and to put them into reality. I recognize a lot of the dynamics of the thing, and obviously I've thought a lot about it. But I still think that something like that is what the system needed and needs.

WN: Was the need in '62 similar to the need in 1991?

BY: I would say so, I would say so. Curiously enough, the style of the present governor [John Waihee], in many ways, was like Jack's style. Benign and seems very genuine to me and things like that, you see. And yet he should not be running the schools. And he should see largely enough to have a superintendent who has room to move and room to find answers to the terrible things that education has come to. The confidence of educators is just nil almost, it seems to me. And people are terribly in fear of the testing and the various charges that have been brought against the educational system. Wow. Well, that's us, you know. There's a lot of similarities, I'd say.

WN: Well, when you look at the history of, say, superintendents, it just stands out in my mind as to how you people lost your jobs or got the jobs. I mean, more than any other department I think. Maybe it's because education is such a motherhood issue. When I'm looking back at newspaper articles about you coming on, Walton Gordon getting the axe, and then you getting the axe, and so forth. Then I come down to Donnis Thompson, for example, and the way she was treated by the board. What is it about education? Is there something that can be said for that?

BY: Well, it's a very difficult arena. It's almost like a family fuss. It's that intimate. In affairs of a society, education of the young is a very intimate and crucial thing. And it's an avenue for aspirations. It's so crucial. And because it is that, and because for the many, many reasons that our society is so disrupted and so distorted in a flow of human development, there are these distortions of poverty and homelessness and poor schooling [which] are just rampant. And this is an embittering thing for society. Very—it's an embittering thing. It puts to the very serious bedrock test of what one believes about a society and its powers for regeneration, its powers for growth, and its powers to look ahead. And education is key in all of that. It's a key. This is why it's a terribly sensitive area. That's nothing profound. That's obvious to us, you and me. But it is such an intimate and integral part of a society's development. Even the hard-nosed Germans who were set in their ways, or the Japanese, who are set in their ways vis à vis education, could not be dogmatic and brush off any change. They sensed the danger in that. Our danger has come to pass in that we've ignored the crucial nature of education. We've ignored it. And we've allowed a hearing in a frantic milieu of the legislature. Or

backstage trades to bring about decisions about education, rather than—in just one small matter, this will illustrate. My wife says that I must have gone [to] three schools per night for months to sell the dual track educational salary, trying to sell this idea of, “Hey, it’s an open system. And you can make your choice.” You could just see the teachers settle back into their chairs, that I wasn’t trying to tell them something that they had to do. I was giving them a choice, an enlightened educational choice.

WN: Now, what is this dual track?

BY: For in-service training.

WN: Oh, in-service training, okay.

BY: It’s just an illustration of what I’m saying, that that took patience and ingenuity and often courage to go up against a militant group of teachers who were indignant about this upstart coming in here and requiring in-service training, and not paying us for it. A real log jam. And it broke open into something very nice—creative exchange of ideas.

If we really look honestly at low test scores or teacher salaries or class size, and convince them [legislators] that this is the way it has to be in order to solve this problem, and it’s going to cost money, or it’s not going to cost money or we’re going to save this, or whatever. So it’s that point. That person’s job [i.e., superintendent] is the interface between the politician, the public, the teacher, and so on. And must make sense. But that’s where the problem is solved, in that way, not in some [legislative] hearings, or something like that. That’s a part of the process. But the real solution comes in imaginative, courageous decisions about, “This is what we’re going to do. And this is what we’ve got to have, folks,” to the legislators. So much of it now, the initiative is someplace else. It’s not in this focal arena of the superintendent. Now, there aren’t a lot of good superintendents around. But everyone that is successful has this kind of adaptability to the reality and being creative here, or having the courage to say no here, so that the aura comes out as an intelligent leader and a leader who respects other people’s opinions and brings other ideas in. And when I see a good idea over here, I’ve got to be able to recognize that as a dandy idea, and not try to take the credit for it.

WN: Has there been a successful—the way you would define successful—superintendent here?

(Pause)

BY: I don’t think so. I think Lowell Jackson was an embarrassment.

WN: He was only there for about a year [1966–67], right?

BY: Oh, less than that. He was there about, maybe, eight months, (I think). He’s at the University of Idaho, and I talk to him some. But he’s hangdog. He keeps his head down and he is ashamed of what he did. I go there to consult sometimes, I’ve helped them with their international programs. And one time, when I went there from Indonesia, they said, “Well, we’ve got somebody whom you may know. He used to be superintendent of schools in Hawai’i, Lowell Jackson.”

So at the meeting, he kept his head down. He was ashamed. Because he'd plied me as a friend and had not been a friend himself. And I found he was there on that committee of the university on the strength of his project in Saudi Arabia. It was a bad project, (I've heard), and it was a failure, and it was embarrassing (because the Americans didn't know the territory). And I knew that, and he knew that I knew it. So you know, what goes around comes around. He still teaches part-time, and he's (probably) made lots of money, and he's got a beautiful home on one of the beautiful lakes in northern Idaho—and things like that. But he never rose above that (Hawai'i) failure, (in my view). I'm not saying you can't rise above a failure, but in his own heart—I know that he knew that he behaved shamefully.

WN: What would you say was the most—what was your best, greatest contribution in your four years? When you look back, what are you really happy with?

BY: I think it was the excitement about education. It was an exciting time. It was an exciting time. You don't plan things like this, but I said to myself, "We've got to vivify the system." So one thing I did was visit every school, even Ni'ihau. And what a wonderful thing. And the people in Kaua'i were just ecstatic. And this is a simple thing, and this is not a thing that anybody and everybody must do. But the fact is it vivified education with the teachers.

A one-room school in Maui was one of the biggest thrills, and I used that time after time as citing the wonder of a one-woman school. And the excitement of that and the way the students were proud. And their tests were high in the state, the one-room school. And when people began to be enraged and wild-eyed about one-room schools (needing to be closed), I would just cite that. "If you do it, make sure you don't hurt that learning surge in that remote community."

I went to Alaska to talk on these terms with the governor and with the state supreme court about this very thing, of the terrible things they'd done to the Indians and to the Eskimos by centralizing them in schools where alcoholism and suicide were rampant. What people found out when I began to go around to the schools, that there was lots of pride and lots of good teaching. I didn't have hard figures, but I had the conviction that our teacher corps (in Hawai'i) was the best in the world, for an organized system of schools. If you want to count it on degrees, we had so many master's degrees. And we had people who were really exciting teachers. When you reach this point, you can push on over into new land, new ideas, new practices. But if you're fighting this rear guard action, like they are now, it's tragic. They can't even get up to normal, or level. They're back on their heels. Everybody taking a pitch at them. And so, in answer to [your question], this openness, this momentum and confidence that this could aspire to the best school system in the world, that may be all I did, (or aspired to do).

WN: Would you do it again?

BY: Yeah, I would do it again. I would do it again. But it would be a different ball game. And I would still have to be as loose and as apparently unorganized as some people said I was. I'd have to be open. I'd have to do some daring things, and try to regenerate the confidence in the schools, the respect for the schools, and respect for the teachers, fight for the teachers. But, you know, things come and go. I thought I would come back here [UH-Hilo]. This will sound grouching, but I might be able to help up here. But, hey, I can't lay a hand on them. I

make them uncomfortable up here, at this campus.

WN: UH-Hilo.

BY: UH-Hilo. It's pitiful, the lack of spirit and enthusiasm and daring.

WN: You mean, right now?

BY: Right now. I go up to the library and so on, but it's kind of depressing for me to see the state of affairs.

WN: I know you sent the majority of your children to public schools. If they were school-age again, would you send them through the public school system again?

BY: Yes, I would, I would. Because they've got to live in this society. And it's very debilitating to the human spirit to foster elitism.

One of my sons, who's now in college, an adopted son, the prognosis was that he would be effeminate, mentally retarded, and so on. I'm glad to bring this point up. He suffered from infantilism. It's a prenatal arrestment of the fetus. His hair came out in tufts. His skin on his little arms was just as tight as a drum. And he seemed not very bright. And I got him when he was three years old. The pediatrician who saw him twelve years later cried when he saw this boy. He was on the swimming team at 'Iolani. He graduated from high school, and he was—and I'm abbreviating this to say that this doctor who came to visit us from Albuquerque said, "This is the miracle of love."

And what I'm really saying is that I've got to have the magnanimous spirit to love the students, the teachers, and the system, you see.

WN: So this was the son that went to a private school ['Iolani] for one year, but ended up in the public schools.

BY: Yeah. And he went into the U.S. Navy. He was in the Vietnam War, in the navy. He's always outreached us (in the prognosis). He's risen higher than our fondest expectations, and we love him very much. We lost—his older brother died soon after we got them, from rampant cancer. But this boy survived. And he's turned brighter and brighter. He is a marvelous musician. He sings beautifully. He continues to grow and grow and grow, you see. And it's because he realized that he belonged. This allowed him to rise above any sort of insecurity and fear and so on. And still growing. So I believe this about the individual and about the system. If I'm strictly business, it's very hard to be loving people, to exert love. It's very hard to mix this up. But it has partly to do with the integrity of the individual, the concern, and the compassion that our society really needs so much.

WN: Okay. Well, I think that's a good place to end, and I thank you very much.

BY: Okay, alrighty.

END OF INTERVIEW

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Ka Ho'ike Ma 'Iolani